ROBERT BROWNING
AND
ALFRED DOMETT

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ROBERT BROWNING

AND

ALFRED DOMETT

Robert Browning.

1835.

London Published by Smith Elder & Cº 15 Waterloo Place.

ROBERT BROWNING

AND

ALFRED DOMETT

EDITED BY

FREDERIC G. KENYON

WITH PORTRAITS

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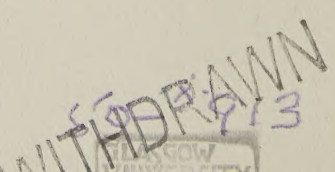

PREFACE

THE early life of Robert Browning is so little known in detail, and letters by him of any considerable length (with the notable exception of those written to Miss Barrett) are so rare, that those who are interested in his character and career will welcome the appearance of a group of his letters, relating for the most part to the years 1840–1846. Their interest will not be lessened by the fact that these letters were written to the friend with whose name the romantic associations of the poem of "Waring" are connected. Of Alfred Domett himself we only have a reflex representation, seeing him in the light of the letters which his friends addressed to him; but of a third member of this group of friends, Joseph Arnould—

afterwards the well-known Indian judge, one of whose judgments, on a question of liberty of conscience, was circulated by grateful natives in letters of gold — we have some noteworthy letters, interesting alike for what they tell us about Browning and for the light which they throw upon the writer himself.

These letters were offered for sale in July 1904, and were purchased for Mr. Reginald Smith, the present head of the firm of Messrs. Smith, Elder, & Co., who has inherited from his father-in-law relations of warm personal regard with the poet's family. By his wish, and with the approval of Mr. R. Barrett Browning, they are now published, and I have added such comments and introductory matter as seemed likely to be useful. Mr. A. N. Domett, the son of "Waring," and Dr. A. H. Arnould, the brother of Sir Joseph Arnould, have kindly co-operated by furnishing such information as was in their power, and by providing the

two portraits which are reproduced in this book.

It is not claimed that the publication of these letters is a matter of universal interest, or indeed that they are likely to interest more than a somewhat special class of readers. Browning's letters were in no sense literary compositions, nor have they the unconscious literary gift which distinguishes the letters, natural and unstudied though they be, of a very few such writers as FitzGerald and Charles Lamb. They serve, however—and serve all the more by reason of Browning's deliberate destruction of his intimate correspondence—to illustrate the character of one who has everything to gain by being known in all the richness of a noble and a sympathetic nature. It is to those who find a special appeal to them in Browning's poetry, and to those who care to learn something of the character of one of the great poets of the Victorian age, that this little volume

is offered, in the certainty that they will find in it nothing to lessen their admiration of the poet or to lower their estimation of the man.

F. G. K.

February, 1906.

Since this volume was in type, an opportunity has arisen for including in it a poem of Robert Browning's entitled "A Forest Thought" (published in *Country Life* in 1905), which, bearing the date 1837, belongs to the same period of the poet's life, and illustrates another of his early friendships.

The friend was William Alexander Dow, special pleader and conveyancer. To him and his wife, on the christening of their eldest son, to whom Robert Browning stood godfather, the poem was inscribed. The album, in the pages of which the poem has been preserved, belongs to the family of the poet's friends.

PORTRAITS

ROBERT BROWNING (1812–1889), 1835 *Frontispiece*

ALFRED DOMETT (1811–1887), 1836 *To face page* 32

From the water-colour drawing by GEORGE LANCE, R.A., 1836, *by permission of* ALFRED NELSON DOMETT, ESQ.

SIR JOSEPH ARNOULD (1813–1886), 1838
To face page 60

From the painting by MIDDLETON, *by permission of* Dr. A. H. ARNOULD.

A FOREST THOUGHT

["*Written and inscribed to* W. A. *and* A. D. *by their Sincere Friend,* ROBERT BROWNING, 13 *Nelson Square, November* 4, 1837."]

In far Esthonian solitudes
The parent-firs of future woods
Gracefully, airily spire at first
Up to the sky, by the soft sand nurst;
Self-sufficient are they, and strong
With outspread arms, broad level and long;
But soon in the sunshine and the storm
They darken, changing fast their form—
Low boughs fall off, and in the bole
Each tree spends all its strenuous soul—
Till the builder gazes wistfully
Such noble ship-mast wood to see,
And cares not for its soberer hue,
Its rougher bark and leaves more few.

But just when beauty passes away
And you half regret it could not stay,
For all their sap and vigorous life,—
Under the shade, secured from strife,
A seedling springs—the forest-tree
In miniature, and again we see
The delicate leaves that will fade one day,
The fan-like shoots that will drop away,
The taper stem a breath could strain—
Which shall foil one day the hurricane:

A FOREST THOUGHT

We turn from this infant of the copse
To the parent-firs,—in their waving tops
To find some trace of the light green tuft
A breath could stir,—in the bole aloft
Column-like set against the sky,
The spire that flourished airily
And the marten bent as she rustled by.

So shall it be, dear Friends, when days
Pass, and in this fair child we trace
Goodness, full-formed in you, tho' dim
Faint-budding, just astir in him :
When rudiments of generous worth
And frankest love in him have birth,
We'll turn to love and worth full-grown,
And learn their fortune from your own.
Nor shall we vainly search to see
His gentleness—simplicity—
Not lost in your maturer grace—
Perfected, but not changing place.

May this grove be a charmed retreat . . .
May northern winds and savage sleet
Leave the good trees untouched, unshorn,
A crowning pride of woods unborn :
And gracefully beneath their shield
May the seedling grow ! All pleasures yield
Peace below and peace above,
The glancing squirrels' summer love,
And the brood-song of the cushat-dove !

ROBERT BROWNING AND ALFRED DOMETT

In the biographies of great men, and especially of those who have influenced the world by their thought or character, the history of their friendships must play an important part, if the record of their development is to be complete. If school and college are rightly regarded as almost decisive stages in the mental career of each one of us, it is not merely on account of the intellectual food given in the regular educational progress, but because we then make, in most cases, the most intimate friendships of our lives. In conflict and conversation with these friends we form our tastes, our opinions, and our characters. We may modify all of these to some extent in after years; but in the main, such as we are when the circle of youthful friendships

breaks up, and its members go on their several ways into the world, such we remain through the rest of our life on earth. If, consequently, we wish to gain full insight into the mental history and characteristics of some great man, we should inquire who were his early friends, and what was the manner of his intercourse with them.

Especially is it instructive to see something of the correspondence between friends, provided that they have a sufficient power of self-expression to put down their real thoughts and feelings upon paper. A man writing to members of his own family may or may not write freely of his thoughts and aspirations. However great be the love and affection subsisting in that circle, it is not always there that he will find the readiest appreciation or the most helpful criticism of his ideas, and the minutiæ of family gossip will be apt to occupy a disproportionate amount of his correspondence. But in letters to a friend who has shared the same training and lived in the same atmosphere he is almost sure to reveal something of his mental char-

acter. "Noscitur a sociis" is only a legitimate assumption, because it is a deduction from the larger truth, "formatur a sociis."

In this respect the student of literature is very differently placed with regard to the two great poets of the Victorian age. Tennyson went to a great university, and lived in the foremost intellectual society which Cambridge then provided. His friends were known and marked men from their youth; their careers were watched with sympathetic eyes, and have been recorded either by their own achievements or by the reminiscences of others. When it is said that Tennyson's Cambridge friends included Arthur Hallam, Monckton Milnes, Spedding, Merivale, and Trench, we know that he lived at that most impressionable age in a society of high culture and taste and literary enthusiasm; and although he owed his genius to no man but himself, it is clear that he had the advantage of favourable and congenial surroundings. Of Browning it might seem difficult to say the same. Camberwell might seem to be a poor substitute for Cambridge, and the days when

he could call himself a M.A. of Oxford were far distant when he wrote "Paracelsus." A Nonconformist society in a London suburb, with an occasional attendance at lectures at University College, is not suggestive of poetry or literary enthusiasm; one thinks rather of Bottles and the British Philistine. And the names of Browning's early friends convey no idea to counteract this impression. Domett, Arnould, Dowson, Young are not names to conjure with; to the public in general they and their works are wholly unknown. How, then, did Browning's genius develope itself, and whence did it derive stimulus and encouragement? Are we to regard his early work as a triumph over an uncongenial environment, or was the soil in reality less unfavourable than it appears.

It is the object of the present volume to do something towards providing an answer to these questions. The letters here printed tell us something (though we would gladly know more) of the friendships formed by Robert Browning in early manhood, and of the circle of influences under

which his genius took form. We have been enabled of late to see how he bore himself as a lover; we see him here in the character of a friend. In both qualities he rings true, and his admirers can find nothing to regret; but in order that the letters now to be published may be intelligible, it is necessary first to say something of the little group of persons named in them, the early friends of Robert Browning. Two in particular deserve special attention—Alfred Domett, to whom all the letters were addressed, and Joseph Arnould, by whom some of them were written. These are the most noteworthy of Browning's early friends; in them he had comrades no less congenial and no less stimulating than Hallam and Milnes; and they were men whose work in literature and in public affairs will bear comparison with that of any of Tennyson's college friends, though it was done in the distant provinces of the Empire, and remains wholly unknown to the English public in general.

Alfred Domett, born in 1811, the year before Robert Browning, was the son of a

naval officer who had fought under Parker against the Dutch in the stubborn action of the Dogger Bank (August 9, 1781), and subsequently had left the royal navy for the merchant service. Browning was at school as a small boy with Alfred's two elder brothers, but they were older than he was, and he never became intimate with them. With Alfred he did not make acquaintance until about 1840, but the acquaintance, once made, ripened rapidly into friendship and affection. Domett had been an undergraduate of St. John's College, Cambridge, from 1829 to 1833, but left without taking his degree, and spent some years in London and abroad before settling down to a profession. He had, perhaps, inherited from his sailor father and grandfather a love of travel on a more extensive scale than was usual at that time. Besides a tour in such comparatively accessible places as the Tyrol and Italy, he had in 1834 visited Canada and the United States. He had a keen eye for scenery, a strong taste for literature, an enthusiastic love of beauty both in nature and in art. His

American tour produced poems on "The Forest Beauties, Upper Canada," and "A Stage-Coach in the Alleghanies." His Italian tour bore fruit in a poem upon Venice, which was published as a little pamphlet of thirty-two pages in 1839. Browning had himself paid a first visit to Italy and the Tyrol in the previous year, and the sentiments which are born in any receptive nature on a first acquaintance with these countries may well have formed the basis upon which the friendship between the two young poets was built up. Certain it is that in 1840 and 1841 Browning and Domett had formed an intimate friendship, which lasted, in spite of a long period of separation, throughout their lives.

The stage of constant personal intercourse was not, indeed, long. New Zealand had just been definitely annexed to the British Empire by the Treaty of Waitangi, in February 1840, whereby the principal chiefs recognised the suzerainty of Queen Victoria, and were themselves confirmed in the full possession of their lands. The New

Zealand Land Company, to whose initiative in the colonisation of the islands the reluctant action of the Home Government was due, was actively engaged in sending out colonists to the principal points of settlement; and in 1842 Domett, who had been called to the Bar in the previous year, was attracted by the prospects of a career in a new country of beautiful scenery and unknown possibilities to enrol himself among the emigrants. His departure from England was not, indeed, the sudden disappearance which Browning playfully represented it to be in the poem founded upon his friend's venture,[1] but it was a sufficiently unexpected resolution. A man of thirty, with the slight employment characteristic of early years at the Bar, and with two little volumes of verse published which had not set the Thames on fire, is not unlikely to welcome some other outlet for his hopes and energies; and Domett had a cousin, William Young,

[1] "Waring," ll. 18–20—

"How, forsooth, was I to know it,
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day."

already established in New Zealand. Consequently there was nothing so very unnatural in the enterprise, though it was more of a leap in the dark in those days than it can be now, when there are no new colonies to be founded. At any rate, go he did, and to his going we are indebted not only for the poem of "Waring" and the allusion at the end of "A Guardian Angel," but also for the letters printed in the present volume.

Most of the letters belong to the earliest years of Domett's residence in New Zealand, when the success or failure of his enterprise was still undetermined, and when, to the eyes at least of his friends at home, he might well have abandoned it and returned to share Browning's house or Arnould's chambers. It will be convenient, however, to summarise the rest of his career at once, both to explain certain allusions in the letters, and to show, so far as may be, what manner of man he was, and what part he played in the history of his adopted country. His first experiences were not propitious. His cousin, William Young, was drowned

before Domett arrived in New Zealand. He himself was laid up for a time by an accident in which his leg was broken. The affairs of the new colony were not going well. The Land Company had difficulties with the Government on the one hand and with the natives on the other; and one of these resulted in a tragedy which caused the profoundest emotions among the settlers. Domett had gone out to the newly-founded settlement of Nelson, in the northern part of the South Island, which was one of the centres from which the Land Company was conducting its schemes of colonisation. In the course of these operations a dispute arose, apparently through an innocent misunderstanding, as to the possession of some land. The Maori chief, Rauparaha, forcibly ejected the English surveyor; a party of some fifty police and civilians attempted to arrest the chief in the middle of a hundred or more of his followers, and a fight ensued, in which thirteen Europeans were killed, while nine more, who had been taken prisoners, were massacred in cold blood.

The affray took place in the valley of the river Wairau, or, as it was then often spelled, Wairoa;[1] and the Wairau massacre (June 1843) remains a lurid incident in the earliest history of the colonisation of New Zealand. Among the victims was Captain Arthur Wakefield, brother of the better known, but not better loved, Edward Gibbon Wakefield; and Domett, who had known him well in his life at Nelson, wrote a most affectionate and warm-hearted estimate of his character in the official report of the disaster, which was circulated by the New Zealand Company.

Domett had gone out to New Zealand without any connection with the Government of the islands; indeed, through his cousin, William Young, whose father was a director of the Land Company, he was associated rather with that party of the colonists which was in not infrequent opposition to the official administration. He took an active part in the agitation against Governor

[1] This is the Wairoa of the concluding lines of Browning's "Guardian Angel"—

"How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?"

Fitzroy, which resulted in the recall of that officer in 1845; and he was the author of the petition which laid the grievances of the colonists before the Home Government. The moderation and ability of this petition attracted attention both in New Zealand and at home, and on the arrival of Governor (afterwards Sir George) Grey, he at once offered Domett a seat in the Legislative Council. This was soon followed by an offer of administrative employment, which continued to form his main public occupation for the next twenty years. In 1848 he was appointed Colonial Secretary of New Munster, the official name of the province comprising the South Island and the southern portion of the North Island. In 1851 he became Civil Secretary of New Zealand. But it was from 1854 to 1856 that the most valuable and characteristic part of his public work was done. During these years he was Resident Magistrate and Commissioner of Crown Lands in the district of Hawke's Bay, in which capacity he had almost independent authority in the administration of

this new settlement. Its capital, Napier, grew up under his guidance, and it is characteristic of him that three of its streets were named after Carlyle, Tennyson, and Browning. It may be doubted whether many of the colonists had an extensive acquaintance with the works even of the second of these authors, though "In Memoriam" and "Maud" had now been published, and he was already Poet Laureate; but it is safe to assume that the third name conveyed no idea to any one except the Commissioner himself.

From Napier, Domett came back to his old home at Nelson in the similar capacity of Commissioner of Crown Lands. Before this, however, in 1855, he had been introduced (without his own consent) into the political sphere of action, which cannot in a new colony be so definitely separated as at home from the civil service, by his unsolicited election as a member of the House of Representatives. Party politics were not much to his taste at any time; and party politics in a small colony are apt to be peculiarly distasteful from their almost

inevitable association with personal questions. Nevertheless, Domett took a prominent place in the House of Representatives, and the wheel of fortune brought him in his turn to the highest position in the colony. In 1862, on the resignation of Sir William Fox and the reconstitution of his administration, Domett was appointed Prime Minister of New Zealand. His ministry was not of long duration. Circumstances were not propitious to it, for he inherited from his predecessor several difficult problems in relation both to the natives and to the Home Government. Misunderstandings with regard to purchases of land, similar to that which had led to the Wairau massacre in 1843, were now leading up to the Maori war of 1863. Between uncivilised natives, even with the character and intelligence of the Maoris, and European settlers such misunderstandings almost inevitably occur; but the consequences, when the situation is not handled with the utmost skill and sympathy, are none the less lamentable. At last the natives took the irretrievable step. A party of British soldiers was ambushed

and slaughtered, and Domett's ministry was forced to declare war, though the conduct of it was left mainly to its successors and to the military representatives of the Home Government.

At the same time the relations between the Home Government and the Colonial politicians were far from satisfactory. The New Zealand Houses, under whatever Prime Minister, were strong in their desire to avoid all responsibility for native affairs; the Colonial Office at home was equally strong in maintaining that the colony could not have responsible government in regard to its members of European birth and at the same time be a Crown Colony for the purpose of its dealings with the Maoris. The colonial attitude, involving as it did a repudiation of the "White Man's Burden," now appears indefensible; but to the colonists of the period, confronted with an exceedingly difficult native question at a time when they wished to be attending to their own business, it no doubt seemed more reasonable. At any rate the result, of friction between the Ministry and the

Governor, is unquestionable. Nor was Domett suited by temperament to deal with a difficult political situation. He disliked party politics; he was not a fluent speaker; he had the scholar's tendency to reticence and avoidance of personal controversy and public discussion; and his tastes were in favour of autocratic administration. Hence, while he produced on paper a valuable memorandum (which never saw the light during his time of office as Premier) on the defence of the colony against the Maoris, his colleagues complained that he did not consult them. Internal dissensions arose in his Cabinet of which he was unaware, or which he failed to control; and the end was the resignation of the Premier in the session of 1863, and a fresh shuffling of the political cards.

This, however, was by no means the close of Domett's political career. In 1864 he became Secretary for Crown Lands of the Colony under the Government of Mr. (afterwards Sir F.) Weld; and this post, for which his experience as Commissioner at Napier and Nelson eminently fitted him, he held for seven years. At the same time he found con-

genial work at Auckland in the organisation and management of the General Assembly Library; and the greater part of his own literary work in New Zealand, though not published until after his return to England, was probably produced during this period.

In 1871, being now sixty years of age, and with a record of thirty years of colonial work behind him, Domett returned to England, amid the warmly-expressed regrets of his fellow-colonists. Official recognition of colonial services was not so common then as it is now, when the colonies occupy a larger place in the British Empire; but in May 1880, in the first month of Mr. Gladstone's Premiership, when Lord Kimberley was Colonial Secretary, the C.M.G. was conferred upon him. Possibly the fact of his friendship with Robert Browning, now at the height of his fame, had something to do with this belated gift of the Colonial Order; possibly his own position as one of the most prominent of colonial poets was likewise taken into account. This position had been won by the publication in 1872 of his long poem, the main work of his life on

the side of literature, "Ranolf and Amohia." It is the epic of New Zealand, not merely because its scene is laid there, but because its finest and most attractive passages are those which describe the romantic scenery of the islands (including the wonderful, and now lost, Pink and White Terraces), and the customs and mythology of their native inhabitants. Too long and too diffuse ever to be a popular poem, and overweighted with philosophical disquisitions, it nevertheless abounds with poetical feeling and beautiful word-pictures, and the variety of its rhyming metres saves it from monotony. This, however, is not the place for a detailed criticism, which would, moreover, be ineffectual without quotation on a scale which would be disproportionate to the present volume.[1]

Some correspondence with regard to the publication of "Ranolf and Amohia" will

[1] Selections from "Ranolf and Amohia" (it may facilitate acquaintance with at least the name of the poem to remark that the accent in Amohia is on the penultimate syllable) may be found in Miles' "Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century (Tennyson to Clough)" and in Sladen's "Australian Poets"; but they are not as extensive as one would wish.

be found on pp. 148–50. A second edition of the poem, in two volumes, was published in 1883. In 1877 Domett published another volume of poetry, entitled "Flotsam and Jetsam," embodying the "Poems" of 1833, and adding thereto some later verses. The whole bore the following dedication, which testifies that the friendship between the poets was unimpaired :—

TO

(IF EVER THERE WERE ONE!)

"A MIGHTY POET AND A SUBTLE-SOULED PSYCHOLOGIST"

TO

ROBERT BROWNING

THIS LITTLE BOOK

WITH A HEARTY WISH THE TRIBUTE WERE WORTHIER

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

To this dedication reference is made in the last letter of the present series, that of April 11, 1877. After that date nothing is preserved, though the personal intercourse continued until Domett's death on November 2, 1887, two years before that of his friend. Of the nature of the friendship between them it is not necessary to speak.

Browning had shown some part of his feelings in "Waring" and "A Guardian Angel," though the references were obscure to all except the few who were acquainted with the Camberwell circle of 1840. He shows it more fully, and in characteristically warm expression, in the present series of letters. Domett, for his part, had spoken out as early as 1841, in his spirited protest against an unsympathetic review of "Pippa Passes," —lines reprinted in "Flotsam and Jetsam."[1] He has been described by one who knew him in New Zealand[2] as a hero worshipper, and Browning was one of his heroes; and the bright-eyed enthusiasm which seems to show

[1] The following extract is a fair sample of the spirit and style of the whole :—

"A black squat beetle, potent for his size,
Pushing tail-first by every road that's wrong
The dirt-ball of his musty rules along—
His tiny sphere of grovelling sympathies—
Has knocked himself full-butt with blundering trouble
Against a mountain he can neither double
Nor ever hope to scale. So, like a free,
Pert, self-complacent scarabæus, he
Takes it into his horny head to swear
There's no such thing as any mountain there!"

[2] W. Gisborne, in his "New Zealand Rulers and Statesmen" (London, 1886).

itself in his portrait lasted apparently to the end.

Closely coupled with Browning and Domett in this circle of intimacy is Joseph Arnould — "an Oxford prize poet, and an admirable dear good fellow, for all his praise, which is better," as Browning described him to Miss Barrett.[1] Born in 1813, he was a year younger than Browning, and two years younger than Domett; and, like both of them, he was a native of Camberwell. His father was a doctor who for many years practised at Camberwell (then the resort of many rich London merchants), and at the same time the owner of Whitecross, a lovely old house on the Thames near Wallingford in Berkshire, to which Joseph Arnould ultimately succeeded. His mother was Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Baily. Joseph Arnould had the usual education of an English gentleman, and his career in its early stages was similar to that of many boys of ability. He was

[1] "Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett," vol. ii. p. 102.

educated at Charterhouse and Wadham College, Oxford, where he matriculated in 1831. In 1834 he won the Newdigate with a poem on "The Hospice of St. Bernard"; and he had the peculiar good fortune to recite it at the Encænia at which the Duke of Wellington was received as Chancellor of the University. The Encænia was a more vivid function then than it has since become, and enthusiasm ran particularly high on this occasion. A special reference to the Duke was introduced into the poem, and Croker, who was present, describes the scene at the moment of its recitation as one of delirious excitement.

From this triumph Arnould, like many other winners of the Newdigate, passed on to a successful career in other fields than literature. He took a first class in Greats in 1836, and became a Fellow of his college in 1838. In January 1841 he married Maria, daughter of H. G. Ridgway, thereby vacating his Fellowship; and in November of the same year he was called to the Bar. For a few months he

shared chambers with Domett, whom (since they had been neighbours from infancy) he may have known for many years; but there is nothing to show when their intimacy commenced. Their companionship was broken by Domett's departure to New Zealand; but the present volume shows that Arnould was one of the inner circle of friends who corresponded with him regularly and at great length. The letters show also something of Arnould's own progress. It was the progress common to so many young barristers—a combination of law, literature, and journalism, until one or the other becomes sufficiently successful and absorbing to expel the others or to reduce them to the status of pastimes. For a time he wrote leaders for the *Daily News*, the new venture in Liberal journalism of which Charles Dickens was the first editor, and he also, through the assistance of Browning, gained admission to some of the magazines; but almost from the first he began to make progress in his regular profession, and law

ultimately triumphed over journalism. In 1848 he published a text-book on the Law of Marine Insurance, which gave him an assured status in his profession, and continues, in revised form, to be the recognised authority on the subject to the present day.

Up to this point Arnould's career had been that of many a young man of ability. The decisive turn to it was given when he had already reached middle age, in 1859, by the offer of the position of Judge of Supreme Court at Bombay. This post, which carried with it a knighthood, he held for ten years; and these ten years of good work in India must be regarded as the main harvest of his life. He married for the second time in 1860 (his first wife having died in the previous year), and in 1869, after about as long a term of service in India as is usually served by men who go to that country late in life, he retired, with ample time and leisure to enjoy what his poet-friend had called "the best" of life, "the last

of life, for which the first was made." In the early days of his retirement he combined literature and law by writing the biography of the first Lord Denman (published in 1873); but otherwise he appears to have lived quietly, without taking any part in public affairs, until his death at Florence in 1886. A small volume of verse was printed for private circulation in 1859, containing the Newdigate prize poem of 1834, a tribute to Lord Denman, written in 1840 as "poet laureate" to the Home Circuit, and poems on the death of Havelock and the marriage of the Princess Royal, contributed to the *Daily News* in January 1858; but the verses addressed to Browning, which are referred to below (p. 49), were never reprinted, and no traces remain of any similar activity in the later years of his life. Nor does there appear to be anything to show to what extent the old friendships were resumed when Browning, Domett, and Arnould were all once more resident in England.

The only name which can rank as a

fourth with those of Browning, Domett, and Arnould is that of Christopher Dowson. His father, of the same name as himself, was engaged in the shipping business, as was his younger brother, Joseph; hence it was generally through him, as the letters show, that Browning and Arnould learnt of opportunities of sending letters to New Zealand. Christopher (or Chris. as he is usually called) Dowson himself had married Domett's sister, and lived near his father in Limehouse, besides having a country home at Woodford in Essex. His tastes, like those of his father, were literary, but he published nothing; and he does not appear to have taken any active part in business. Of the warmth of Browning's feelings towards him, and the general affection in which he was held by all the Camberwell group of friends, the following letters bear sufficient testimony; but no record, either of achievement or of personality, otherwise remains. He died, after about a year's illness, in 1848, of consumption. His death marked,

in Arnould's opinion, the final dissolution of the society, known as "The Colloquial," to which all the friends had belonged, with others—Young, Pritchard, Joseph Dowson—who are less mentioned in the present group of letters, and with whom it is consequently unnecessary here to concern ourselves.[1]

With this much of preface, we may proceed to the letters themselves. The first, a brief note of half-a-dozen lines, is without date, but evidently belongs to 1840, the year of the publication of "Sordello." St. Perpetua's Day is March 7.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

[*March* 7, 1840.]

MY DEAR DOMETT,—Pray accept the book,[2] and do not reject me. However, I

[1] A good account of all the group is given by Mr. W. Hall Griffin in an article entitled "Early Friends of Robert Browning," in the *Contemporary Review* for March 1905. To this article, and to an earlier one on "Robert Browning and Alfred Domett" in the same *Review* for January 1905, I am indebted for some of the details in the preceding pages.

[2] "Sordello."

hope you will like it a little, and beat it famously yourself[1] ere the season is out.—Ever yours most truly,

R. Browning.

Saturday Night,
St. Perpetua's Day !! (see Almanack)

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

[Rd. *March* 1840.—A. D.]

Monday Morning.

My dear Domett,—I was a little way out of town when your letter arrived: how much it gratified me, blame as well as praise, I cannot tell you, nor need, I hope. The one point that wants correcting is where you surmise that I am "difficult on system." No, really—the fact is I live by myself, write with no better company, and forget that the "lovers" you mention are part and parcel of that self, and their

[1] A little bit of playful affectation this, taken as such and perfectly understood on both sides.—A. D. [A pencil note at the foot of the page of the album in which the letter is preserved.]

choosing to comprehend *my* comprehensions but an indifferent testimony to their value: whence it happens, that precisely when "lovers," one and all, bow themselves out at the book's conclusion . . . enter (according to an old stage-direction) two fishermen to the one angel, Stokes and Nokes to the author of "Venice"[1] (who should have been there, *comme de droit*, had I known him earlier), and ask, reasonably enough, why the publication is not confined to the aforesaid brilliant folks, and what do hard boards and soft paper solicit if not their intelligence, such as it may be? I wish I had thought of this before; meantime I am busy on some plays (those advertised) that shall be plain enough if my pains are not thrown away—and, in lieu of Sir Philip and his like, Stokes may assure himself that I see him (first row of the pit, under the second oboe, hat between legs, play-bill on a spike, and a "comforter" round his throat "because of the draught from the stage"), and unless he leaves off sucking his orange

[1] *i.e.* Domett himself; see above, p. 7.

at the pathetic morsels of my play, I hold them nought.

I have just received a note from Chr. Dowson—a piece of himself, so kind is it—and must try to thank him forthwith. After all, writing unintelligible metaphor is not voted as bad as murder—some murders—this Islington affair, for instance. Nay, *Bell's Life in London*, of yesterday week, after exposing the malice of a report "that the long and earnestly expected set-to between the Snuffy Seedsman and Bermondsey George was off," and setting an anxious correspondent ("Alligris") right on "Grab" the black [and] tan crop-eared dog's mother's pedigree, assured its readers "Browning" was "a lofty poet." Somebody must have vouched to the Editor for my being seven feet high.

I must get Dowson's assent ere I try to tempt you here, for the quietest of dinners, ere long: will you much mind the walk, this odd weather? snow fell a minute since, and now a sun (after a sort) shines merrily. Don't you feel a touch of the vagabond,

in early spring-time? How do the lines go—

ἠλιβάτοις ὑπὸ κευθμῶσι γενοίμαν
ἵνα με πτεροῦσσαν ὄρνιν
θεὸς ἐν πταναῖς ἀγέλαισι θείῃ
ἀρθείην δ' ἐπὶ πόντιον
κῦμα τᾶς 'Αδριηνᾶς ἀκτᾶς
'Ηριδανοῦ θ' ὕδωρ.[1]

and so would you I fancy.—Ever yours most truly,

R. Browning.

These two letters are all that there is to show for the earlier years of friendship, when the friends could meet, at "The Colloquial" and elsewhere, and were not dependent upon correspondence for knowledge of each other's thoughts and doings. But

[1] Euripides, "Hippolytus," ll. 732–737. Mr. Gilbert Murray's admirable version being available, it is unnecessary to search for any other :

"Could I take me to some cavern for my hiding,
In the hill-tops where the Sun scarce hath trod ;
Or a cloud make the home of my abiding,
As a bird among the bird-droves of God !
Could I wing me to my rest amid the roar
Of the deep Adriatic on the shore,
Where the water of Eridanus is clear."

before the date of the next letter, "Waring" had given them all the slip—

> "Chose land-travel or sea-faring,
> Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
> Rather than pace up and down
> Any longer London town."

The season was not, indeed, "the snowiest in all December" when he started for the Antipodes, but the beginning of May. There may have been truth in the hint of impatience at deferred success in London as the determining cause of his departure; but whether this was so or not, the following lines (especially the last two) are certainly historical:—

> "Meantime, how much I loved him,
> I find out now I've lost him,
> I who cared not if I moved him,
> Who could so carelessly accost him,
> Henceforth never shall get free
> Of his ghostly company."

The letters which follow, written whenever Chris. Dowson gave warning that a boat was starting for New Zealand, show eloquently the depth and warmth of Browning's affection. The first was written within a few

Alfred Domett

From the water colour drawing by George Lance, R.A. 1836

London, Smith Elder & Co. 65 Waterloo Place S.W.

weeks of Domett's departure, when the feelings aroused by that departure were still fresh.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
May 22, 1842.

My dear Domett,—This is the third piece of paper I have taken up to put my first words to you on; *this* must do, for time is urgent. I cannot well say *nothing* of my constant thoughts about you, most pleasant remembrances of you, earnest desires for you—yet I will stop short with this —as near "nothing" as may be. I have a sort of notion you will come back some bright morning a dozen years hence and find me just gone—to Heaven, or Timbuctoo; and I give way a little to this fancy while I write, because it lets me write freely what, I dare say, I said niggardly enough—my real love for you—better love than I had supposed I was fit for; but, you see, when I was not even a boy, I had fancy in plenty and no kind of judgment—so I said, and

wrote, and professed away, and was the poorest of creatures; that, I think, is out of me now, but the habit of watching and warding continues, and—here is a case where I do myself wrong. However, I am so sure now of my feelings, when I do feel—trust to them so much, and am deceived about them so little (I mean, that I so rarely believe I like where I loathe, and the reverse, as the people round me do) that I can speak about myself and my sentiments with full confidence. There! And now, let that lie till we meet again—God send it!

I shall never read over what I send you—reflect on it, care about it, or fear that you will not burn it when I ask you. So do with me. And tell me all about yourself, straight, without courteously speculating about my being, "doings and drivings" (unless there is some special point you want to know); and by my taking the same course (sure you care for all that touches me), we shall get more done in a letter than when half is wasted. Begin at the beginning—tell me how you are, where you are, what you do

and mean to do—and to do in our way, for live properly you cannot without writing, and to write a book now will take one at least the ten or dozen years you portion out for your stay abroad. I don't expect to do any real thing till then: the little I, or anybody, can do as it is, comes of them *going to New Zealand*—partial retirement and stopping the ears against the noise outside; but all is next to useless—for there is a creeping, magnetic, assimilating influence nothing can block out. When I block it out, I shall do something. Don't you feel already older (in the wise sense of the word) and farther off, as one "having a purchase" against us? What I meant to say was, that only in your present condition of life, so far as I see, is there any chance of your being able to find out what is wanted, and how to supply the want when you precisely find it. I have read your poems: you can do anything—and (I do not see why I should not think) will do much. I will, if I live. At present, I don't know if I stand on head or heels: what men require, I don't know—and of

what they are in possession know nearly as little.

Of me: a couple of days after you left, I got a note from Macready—the disastrous issue of the play you saw of Darley's brother, had frightened him into shutting the house earlier than he had meant. Nothing new this season, therefore, but next, &c., &c., &c. So runs this idle life away, while you are working! I shall go to the end of this year, as I now go on—shall print the Eastern play you may remember hearing about [1]—finish a wise metaphysical play (about a great mind and soul turning to ill),[2] and print a few songs and small poems which Moxon advised me to do for popularity's sake![3] These things done (and my play out), I shall have tried an experiment to the end, and be pretty well contented either way.

[1] "The Return of the Druses," published in 1843 as No. iv. of "Bells and Pomegranates."

[2] Presumably "A Soul's Tragedy," though this was not published until 1846, in the last number (viii.) of "Bells and Pomegranates."

[3] The original "Dramatic Lyrics" appeared as Part iii. of "Bells and Pomegranates" in 1842. For an account of the genesis of this series of publications of poems in pamphlet form, see Gosse's "Personalia," p. 52.

The 7th of May last was my birthday (your's is the 20th, tho' you did not say so at our parting dinner, when I spoke about May and birthdays!), and on that day I dined with dear Chr. Dowson and your sister. We were alone and talked of you and little else; I got your books and slip of note—here it is, under the paper I write on! With this I send you your "Sordello." I suppose (am sure indeed) that the translation from Dante on the fly-leaf is your own. I had been fool enough (I told you, I believe) to purpose giving you my whole wondrous works in a stiff binding—good against rats. But I thought twice! The true best of me is to come, and you shall have it, and I shall certainly never be quite wanting in affection for essays that have got me your love, as you say, and I believe: but I don't know that I shall ever read them again. Along with "Sordello," [1] take and keep, for my sake and its own, "Nôtre Dame." You would not read here, and *shall* read

[1] A footnote here says: "I send your copy to Young along with his books."

there—I mean to send you more of Hugo's books when I can get them. Meanwhile begin with this.

Give my kindest regards to Young—the books[1] I promised him he must have, I suppose! The press blunders, too, sicken me. I look for a letter from him, and will answer it. As for this to you, I mean it to be short—for I shall let no ship I hear of sail without a few lines, and I want to avoid the feeling of having a deal to do on every such occasion.

Tell me if I can do anything for you. My father, mother, and sister are urgent that I should send their very kindest regards to you. I saw your father (from a distance) this morning at Chapel—very well apparently. It seems even yet as if you would "run over" some fine morning; but you are better away. See what good one gets from one's friends staying. I have not seen Arnould since the last night—just because

[1] A second footnote says: "I do not send him, say (nor send you), a 'Strafford,' because I have made up my mind to correct it in most ways and publish it in 'Bells, &c.'" This intention, however, was never carried out. "Young" is William Curling Young, Domett's cousin, who did not live to receive these messages.

I may if I will. I shall not wait (nor ever wait) "for an answer," friend-like, but write by next opportunity.—Ever yours,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
July 13, 1842.

My dear Domett,—"I hope you are well"—how one discovers the sense of our elders at every turn! I begin writing so, naturally. I do hope and trust you are well. Here is a ship just off you-wards and I write at night—nothing about what you are sure to have newspapers full of, but such small talk as we used to have once here or at Limehouse, the true charm of which—there, there! Enough of that. Best and first news, all *I* know that you know are well, from your father and brother John, who, I am told, *looked* well last Sunday at Chapel, to Chr. Dowson and your sister, who, I can pleasantly testify, *are* well. I and Sarianna passed a happy, friendly day

with them at Woodford (S., two or three days indeed) walking and talking in a bowery flowery place on the wood's edge —and did not we just drink your good fortunes after dinner, Chris. and I! (Last Friday, was all this pleasure.) I send with this Tennyson's new vol.[1] and, alas, the old with it—that is, what he calls old. You will see, and groan! The alterations are insane. *Whatever* is touched is spoiled. There is some woeful mental infirmity in the man—he was months buried in correcting the press of the last volume, and in that time began spoiling the new poems (in proof) as hard as he could. "Locksley Hall" is shorn of two or three couplets. I will copy out from the book of somebody who luckily transcribed from the proof-sheet—meantime *one* line, you will see, *I have* restored—see and wonder! I have been with Moxon this morning, who tells me that he is miserably thin-skinned, sensitive

[1] The "Poems" of 1842, in two volumes, of which one was a revised reissue of poems previously published, while the other contained new poems. Browning's opinion of the results of Tennyson's self-criticism is remarkably different from that of critics in general.

to criticism (foolish criticism), wishes to see no notices that contain the least possible depreciatory expressions—poor fellow! But how good when good he is—that noble "Locksley Hall," for instance—and the "St. Simeon Stylites"—which I think perfect. Do you (*yes*) remember our day on the water last year? To think that he has omitted the musical "Forget-me-not" song, and "the Hesperides"—and the "Deserted House" [1] —and "everything that is his," as distinguished from what is everybody's! Sir L. Bulwer has published a set of sing-songs; I read two, or one, in a review, and thought them abominable. Mr. Taylor's affected, unreal putting together, called "Edwin the Fair," is the flattest of fallen. I don't remember anything else since your time. Dickens is back, and busy in "doing" America for his next numbers—sad work. But here is a pleasant circumstance: Sir J.

[1] The "Deserted House" was restored in 1848, and Tennyson ("Life," i. 6) expressed regret that he had not restored the "Hesperides," which has since been reprinted in the Oxford Miniature Edition of 1900. The "Forget-me-Not" song was an earlier version of the song at the end of "The Miller's Daughter."

Hanmer (you know his pretty poems), an interesting person, in Parliament this session for the first time as a Tory (born so, and bred so), has, two nights ago, most resolutely recanted on better advisement, and voted against Peel in the matter of the Corn Laws with a good energetic half-dozen words, beside—so that even political convertites may not be despaired of!

I shall print nothing till October—the book season has been, says Moxon, no season at all, the trade flourishing (same authority) more in one month, January, last year, than in the whole of these present six months. (Same cry in Town and Country.) I then hope to go on with my plays and to get out, what I call, some dramatic Lyrics, which I shall make part of the series—more of this in my next.

I cannot say how much a letter from you will delight me. Here everything goes flatly on, except the fierce political reality (as it begins to be). Our poems, &c., are poor child's play—and I do, without affectation, very often think of you, and your progress, and welfare, and return one not

very distant day:—so that (I mean to say) while, out of the myriad things that *could* be written of, scarcely one seems worthier note than another, *you* cannot write about acorn-planting or house-building or bird-shooting without interesting me. There is much, everything, to be done in England just now, and I have certain plans which shall either fail, or succeed, but not lie dormant. But all my heart's interest goes to your tree-planting life. Yet I don't know.

And now God bless you, my dear Domett. My head turns, and I must leave off—to write more and better soon. Give my cordial greeting to Young. I had meant to have written to him, but will not miss next ship's opportunity. My father, mother, and sister are one and all well, and remember you staunchly! Tell me what you have done in the voyage — written, thought of writing, at least, and try me with commissions, &c. You must have so much to get done, and Chris. Dowson has work of his own, and here am I idle and wanting employ, and yours ever,

ROBERT BROWNING.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
September 31 (*sic*), 1842.

Dear Domett,—A ship sails your way to-morrow or soon, so I hear; and tho' I have nothing new to tell, I cannot let the occasion pass of saying a little to, instead of thinking much of, you. When shall I know something—read something in your hand, about Port Nelson and your way of life?

Did you ever read some verses, Sonnets —two books-full—by Sir John Hanmer? I think—am sure, indeed, that I heard you mention them once. I have passed a pleasant week, this month, at his seat in Flintshire and, to my pleasure more than surprise, he knew you well—(we talked of books and bookmakers). I said there would be a rare Godsend by some New Zealand packet soon!—And will there not?

See what I send you! the last notice of Tennyson—by—guess! I will write his name—that is, the author's—at the end of his article, so that you may read and divine

and applaud your own penetration. And there is an estimate of me and mine—by, I can't guess whom—which some wiseacre of a sub-editor has been allowed to travel over and spoil in as many points as he has touched; for you must know, the MS. was forwarded to me, by a friend of the unnamed penman, to *assay* my good nature —which is virgin gold when these matters are concerned—and I, not being "offended" (the friend's word!) at the sharp bits, or what are meant for such, here and there—have furnished some third party with a pretext for softening the soft bits the wrong way—so that instead of flaring heaven-high, as Carlyle would say—I only range with the gas-lamps in ordinary. Read and laugh, for thereto I send it![1] In a week or two I will send some lyrics I think of printing. "But the time of figs is not yet."

I have seen nobody this long time, not Cris. Dowson even—Arnould never since

[1] These articles on Tennyson and Browning appear in the *Church of England Quarterly Review* for October 1842. The Tennyson article was by Leigh Hunt (see p. 97). For the writer of the second article see the next letter.

our parting-night—but I will see both soon. Carlyle I saw some weeks since: a crazy or sound asleep—not dreaming—American was with him—a special friend of Emerson's—and talked! I have since heard, to my solace, that my outrageous laughters have made him ponder seriously of the hopelessness of England—which he would convert to something or other. Milnes, who avouched this, is gone to Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Cairo, as we say the Elephant and Castle and Charing Cross. I saw the last of him: you would like him.

And now, dear Domett, Good be with you—for I can't contract the words—and with me, too, in hearing soon of it. God help you! Give my best regards to Young.

ROBT. BROWNING.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

NEW CROSS, HATCHAM, SURREY,
Dec. 13, 1842.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—C. Dowson, with whom I dined yesterday, tells me that a ship

sails for your country to-morrow, so I write a word or two. I could easily fancy you were no farther off than Brighton—not to say Exeter—all this while, so much of you is here, and there, and wherever I have been used to see, or think about you. We all talk of you, wish you well, and wonder all manner of ways. Arnould and his wife came here last week, and we spoke irreverently of your ploughing, hopefully of your harvest, and so on, just as if you were not in the thick of it, and victorious over it, too, by this time. I have wished myself with you less often than I expected—and no doubt the reason is, that you are not so surely away, after all.

Are you well, comfortable, hopeful, speculative, wiser thro' the new, strange life? I shall hear and know when the letters begin to come with March or April —and I do long to hear and know this, remember.

I suppose Dowson writes by this ship. The good news of his new son, and Mrs. Dowson's well-doing, will come to you from

other quarters, but Arnould does not write this time, I think. He and his wife are quite well and duly mindful of you; they bade me say much more than this—but you know them both. We are all well here.

With this you get some more verses of mine[1]—I shall have more ready ere long, I hope—and better. Macready is getting on poorly enough; he pledges himself to keep his Theatre open till he has played my Tragedy[2]—I don't know what will be the end of it. The only novelty we have had in books as yet has been Macaulay's "Lays of Rome," a kind of revenge on that literature which so long plagued ours with Muses and Apollo and Luna and all that, by taking the stalest subjects in it, and as plentifully bestowing on them the commonplaces of our indigenous ballad verse—"Then out spake brave Sir Cocles"—"Go, hark ye, stout Sir Consul"—and a deal more. I have

[1] No. iii. of "Bells and Pomegranates," containing some sixteen Dramatic Lyrics, among which was "Waring."

[2] "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," which Macready ultimately produced in February 1843, as narrated in Arnould's letter below.

only seen extracts, certainly, but they give me this notion. Dickens' "Notes" have sold vastly; in a fortnight we have his new "Martin Chuzzlewit" affair — the name seduces one little. I don't well know what Carlyle is doing. I spent an evening with him last week: he talked nobly—seemed to love Goethe more than ever. Do you prosecute German-study? I read pretty well now.

If you write and resolve on any scheme—to publish—to get acted—here am I, you know. I can do a little more now than I could before—it will be the true pleasurable thing of things for me, to do what may be done. Think of this: how you *ought* to write! and *will*. By the way, Arnould wrote the cleverest, gratefullest *verse*-thanks to me, the other day, for these lyrics of mine, and brought *you* in so happily!

Give my kindest regards to Young. I have seldom been so annoyed as by the sad tale that reached me of his fire, and loss of books. Give him the accompanying "Lyrics"—what gifts! Such as they are, I

shall expect your criticism and counsel, at a fabulous length, on them.

Who, do you suppose, wrote that article in the *C. of E. Quarterly?*[1] Horne! Judge of my astonishment. But was it not generous of an unappreciated man, so to write?

God bless you, my dear Domett, and so shall He bless me too. Take care of your soul and body for the sake of their brave selves—then of your troop of lovers—and *then* of your own for ever,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
March 5, 1843.

My dear Domett,[2]—Chris. Dowson has just called here and told me that a ship sails to-morrow for your world. I should have heard of it sooner, no doubt, but he did not receive a note in which I

[1] *Church of England Quarterly Review.* See p. 45.
[2] "Dowson" in the original, by a slip of the pen.

had charged him to watch for me. We two went up our hills (what are *your* hills, now?) and talked about you, and wished you well, and ourselves well, too, in soon hearing from you—"every day one may expect news now," said Dowson, and then he bade me say we had so walked and talked. I hope therefore that my next letter will be from a new starting place, will be about news of you.

I send the "Druses" (which missed a conveyance) and my new play;[1] expect more and better things—I get heart, if not strength, I think. But *you*—what are you doing, or have you done? I do, most truly, look for great works from you—send them to me, and I will manage everything. Here we are sound asleep. Bulwer's new novel, "The Last of the Barons," is to be, he says, the last of Bulwer's—and seems a poor affair, if one may judge by the single extract I have seen. Dickens is not asleep, but uproarious and (I think) dis-

[1] "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," printed as No. v. of "Bells and Pomegranates," almost simultaneously with No. iv., "The Return of the Druses."

gusting, in his Pecksniffs and (what Strafford said of the Parliament) "that generation of odd names and natures." Tennyson has gone off to some place of no name on the seacoast, whereto goes a post once a week in the person of the next town's muffin-man. Milnes is, or was, in Egypt or Syria. Campbell I saw a couple of days since in a kind of maudlin drowse over the fire in Moxon's shop. "Very likely Campbell," said Moxon, when I asked who it was: "he does not know where to go to kill time, and we take no notice of him"—or words to that effect. See what you lose!

How do you get on with German? I read tolerably—and find the best help is Schlegel and Tieck's translation of Shakespeare. I have not seen Carlyle lately, this confounded play having martyrised me; but I will see him.

All this while, characteristically enough, I do not write about *our* friends—yours always, and certainly *mine* now. Arnould is on the circuit, but he and his wife have been zealous as Chris. himself on my side.

Dear old Pritchard is always prophesying about you, too. My mother is, I think, better than she has lately been; my father and sister are quite well; they all bid me give their true love to you, as you may suppose. I enclose for Young the copies I had meant to have accompanied by a letter, but my minutes are counted, and he will, I know, let me wait a week till I can do myself better justice than by this twilight in this hurry. Meantime remember me to him, as I would wish to be remembered: and good, good-bye, dear Domett—you will not forget me, I am sure. God bless you.

R. BROWNING.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

Monday, May 15, 1843.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—A ship sails for your port to-morrow, I see, and I must say a word or two by its help—tho' I shall not deny that the sad news received since I last wrote[1]—(some two or three days

[1] Probably the death of W. C. Young.

only)—make this poor inefficient business of writing very painful just now. Let me only trust that you and all friends "grieve down this blow." I have heard something, too, of a mischance of your own—some accident to your leg—of which I shall hear more from C. Dowson in a few days. *You* will come back again, I know, for I *know* it, having set my heart on it; but *do* come back safely and soundly, in limb as well as life!

What shall I tell you?—that we are dead asleep in literary things, and in great want of a "rousing word" (as the old Puritans phrase it) from New Zealand or any place *out* of this snoring dormitory. Carlyle has just given us a book, however; not the study on "English History" (Cromwell, &c.) that he was engaged on when you were with us—but there, what, in short, I shall send you by next ship.[1] Carlyle came here a few weeks ago—walked about the place, and talked very wisely and beautifully. He cannot get on for the row and noise, and

[1] "Past and Present."

wants to take a cottage with a couple of rooms only—"for," said he, "I can dress my own meals—roast beef and boil tea—do everything for myself." His brother, Dr. Carlyle, came with him—a remarkable man, too.

My own health is none of the best. I go out but seldom, so keep meaning to see Arnould and other friends instead of seeing them — (that is for some weeks, almost months past). I saw your father at Chapel yesterday, however, and can testify to his excellent looks. So glides this foolish life away, week by week! I have a desk full of scrawls at which I look, and work a little. I want to publish a few more numbers of my "Bells"—and must also make up my mind to finish a play I wrote lately for Charles Kean, if he will have it.[1] (Macready has used me vilely.) But I seem only

[1] Presumably "Colombe's Birthday," though it was not in fact acted until 1853, when Miss Faucit produced it at the Haymarket. In a letter of September 13, 1845 ("Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.," vol. i. p. 200), Browning recalls the fact that "Charles Kean offered to give me 500 of those pounds for any play that might suit him."

beginning to see what one (someone, *you*) might do, writing. They take to criticising me a little more, in the Reviews—and God send I be not too proud of their abuse! For there is no hiding the fact that it is of the proper old drivelling virulence with which God's Elect have in all ages been regaled. One poor bedevilling idiot, whose performance reached me last night only, told a friend of mine, the night before that, "how *in reality* he admired beyond measure this and the other book of Mr. B.'s, but that *in the review*, he thought it best to," &c., &c. This Abhorson boasted that he got £400 a year by his practices! But New Zealand is still left me!

The Royal Academy opened last week (that is, its Exhibition — what English I write!) and may shut again as fast as possible: two or three fine-coloured little things by Etty, a clear, bright Mediterranean reminiscence of Stanfield's, and, in sculpture, a clever group, by Lough, I desire to see again. Turner is hopelessly gone (Lance, your friend, has a very happy single figure—

a village coquette—that I would see twice, too).

Do you know anything of Sir John Hanmer's poetry? I think—am sure, indeed, you do, or did, for we spoke of them one day. I know him and them, and (whether his fine simple nature puts me into conceit of them) like them much—so much, that I should be vexed if *you* did *not* like them, so do not send them till further advice. He knows *your* verses.

Should you like to write for any Review here? You had formerly some notion of the kind, I think. I can get access to several Editors now. There is an odd way the Tory prints have, at present, of getting along; they hire Liberals, and let them be liberal, so that the market is thrown open. I will bargain my best for you—but don't leave off ploughing, for poetry will come of that! Here the vilest mill goes round and round; one quarterly has an article on Leibnitz, another on Spinosa, a third on Descartes. And outside the dry dust track is a strip of sand, and beyond—your country.

I am dull, in every sense, this dull evening, and you are veritably *nearer* to me than the people in the city five miles off. Some call me over from time to time (*there* lies note the last, which I stopped this to say "no" to); but these are away—so are not you. I wish I had seen more of you, for I forget nothing I did see, and so should be richer and better able to bear dull evenings—but the time will come yet. "Meantime all my wishes flee, to your home beyond the sea," as dear Proctor sings. God bless you. You will be glad to hear we are all well; all thoroughly yours, of course. Pritchard, who loves you, is well; I know nobody else of your acquaintance. You will write to me when you can, I am sure; and tell me anything I may do—commission to execute—so far as my poor ability goes.—Ever yours, my dear Domett, R. Browning.

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey.

In addition to Browning's letters, the album into which Domett fastened his friend's letters contains some of Arnould's,

notably the following long epistle (four large quarto pages, closely covered with small writing), containing a vivid account of the celebrated episode of the production by Macready of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." It is undated, but evidently belongs to about the same date as the letter just printed, since it refers to the same piece of personal news, namely, Domett's broken leg. The production of Browning's play at Drury Lane was on the 11th of February; but Arnould's letter does not profess to have been written immediately afterwards. On the contrary, the incident comes early in the recapitulation of "half a year of news."

Of the incident itself it is unnecessary to say more in this place. Full accounts of it are given by Mr. Gosse in his "Personalia," and by Browning himself in his letter to Mr. F. Hill, printed in Mrs. Sutherland Orr's "Life" (p. 118). Both of these, however, give the story as related from memory forty years after its occurrence, whereas Arnould's is the contemporary record of an eye-witness. On the other hand, with regard to what

passed between Browning, Macready, and Phelps, Arnould obviously gives only a second-hand version. In substance, however, there is no variation, and the facts of the case, at least as viewed by Browning and his friends, may be taken to be sufficiently on record. It is noteworthy that Browning himself wrote no account of the incident to Domett, and makes no allusion to it beyond a grateful recognition (in his letter of March 5) of Arnould's zeal on his side, and the single phrase, "Macready has used me vilely," in the letter of May 15.

J. ARNOULD TO A. DOMETT

18 VICTORIA SQUARE, PIMLICO.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—Having nearly half a year of news to communicate, I ought to lose no time in formalities; but I cannot help stopping at the outset to condole with you on what no doubt you will have forgotten months before this reaches you, viz., the broken leg. How like him! we immediately exclaimed. "To think of his stumb-

Sir Joseph Arnould
1813-1886
from the painting by Middleton

London: Smith Elder & Co 15 Waterloo Pl

ling about rivers in that way," cried Maria, "and then, poor fellow, he has nobody to nurse him." Such things we thought and said in our antipodical world when we heard it. Thank you too very much for those New Zealand papers; we found *you* out at once as the "correspondent." Capital vivid sketches they were—completely taking us with you into your wild scramblings and climbings. Confess, was it not in one of those, over some "pig of a stump," that you met with your misfortune? I speak of it mildly, because it will have been, of course, all over for months when you get this, though, I assure you, it caused us great concern when we heard it.

Well! really I know not where to begin in the half-year's history, there are so many things to tell which you would wish to hear. As one must begin, however, somewhere, suppose we take Browning. About a month after I wrote he published another number of "Bells and Pomegranates," called "Dramatic Lyrics" (but, after all, I daresay he has sent you a copy of these, so you will want no

description of them). If you have seen them I am sure I need not do more than ask you if you do not think "Count Gismond" and "Artemis" of a very high order, and also "Madhouse Cells." "Waring" delighted us all very much, for we recognised in it a fancy portrait of a very dear friend. I feel sure Browning has sent you this book, so I will say no more of it. Well, on the 11th of February his play, "A Blot on the 'Scutcheon,"[1] three acts, was brought out at Drury Lane. That was all the public knew about the fact; but those who knew *Browning* were also aware of a little history of bad feeling—intrigue and petty resentment—which I fancy, making all allowance for both sides, amounts to just this. Macready had the usual amount of plays on hand and promises to authors unperformed when you and I witnessed the "deep damnation of the bringing forth" of "Plighted Troth."[2] That shook him a good deal. He might possibly, remem-

[1] The usual misquotation of the title of this play makes its earliest appearance here.

[2] A play by Darley; see p. 36.

bering "Strafford," have looked doubtfully at Browning's chance of writing a play that would take, and he brought out two new plays, one of which ("The Patrician's Daughter," by John W. Marston) had a decent success, while still nothing was heard of Browning's play. Meanwhile judicious friends, as judicious friends will, had a habit of asking Browning when the play was coming out—you can fancy how sensitively Browning would chafe at this. At length the paramount object with him became to have the play played, no matter how, so that it was at once. With these feelings he forced Macready to name an early day for playing it. The day was named, Macready was to take the part of Austin Tresham, which was made for him, and everything was going on swimmingly, when lo! a week or so before the day of representation, Macready declines altogether his part unless the play can be postponed till after Easter. Browning, naturally in "a sulky chafe" at this, declines postponement with haughty coolness; indicates that if Mr. Phelps will

take the part he shall be perfectly satisfied; and under this new arrangement, Mr. Phelps having zealously laboured at his part, comes the last rehearsal day. Macready then again appears, hints that he has studied the character, will act the first night. Upon this our Robert does not fall prone at his feet and worship him for his condescending goodness—not that at all does our Robert do, but quite other than that—with laconic brevity he positively declines taking the part from Phelps, dispenses with Macready's aid, &c., and all this in face of a whole green-room. You imagine the fury and whirlwind of our managerial wrath—silent fury, a compressed whirlwind, volcano fires burning white in our pent heart. We say nothing, of course, but we do our spiteful uttermost; we give no orders—we provide paltry machinery—we issue mandates to all our dependent pen-wielders—to all tribes of men who rejoice in suppers and distinguished society. Under penalty of our managerial frown they are to be up and doing in their dirty work. The results of their admirable labours I have

enclosed for your inspection, and now may proceed to give you an exacter notion of the real reception the piece met with. The first night was magnificent (I assume that Browning has sent you the play). Poor Phelps did his utmost, Helen Faucit very fairly, and there could be no mistake at all about the honest enthusiasm of the audience. The gallery (and this, of course, was very gratifying, because not to be expected at a play of *Browning*) took all the points quite as quickly as the pit, and entered into the general feeling and interest of the action far more than the boxes—some of whom took it upon themselves to be shocked at being betrayed into so much interest for a young woman who had behaved so improperly as Mildred. Altogether the first night was a triumph. The second night was evidently presided over by the spirit of the manager. I was one of about sixty or seventy in the pit, and we yet seemed crowded when compared to the desolate emptiness of the boxes. The gallery was again full, and again among all who were there were the same decided

impressions of pity and horror produced. The third night I again took my wife to the boxes. It was evident at a glance that it was to be the last. My own delight, and hers too, in the play was increased at this third representation, and would have gone on increasing to a thirtieth; but the miserable, great, chilly house, with its apathy and emptiness, produced on us both the painful sensation which made her exclaim that "she could cry with vexation" at seeing so noble a play so basely marred. Now, there can be no doubt whatever that the absence of Macready's name from the list of performers of the new play was the means of keeping away numbers from the house. Whether if he had played and *they* had come the play would have been permanently popular is another question. I don't myself think it would. With some of the grandest situations and finest passages you can conceive, it does undoubtedly want a sustained interest to the end of the third act; in fact the whole of that act on the stage is a falling off from the second act; which I need not tell you is

for all purposes of performance the most unpardonable fault. Still, it will no doubt—nay, it must—have done this, viz. produced a higher opinion than ever of Browning's genius and the great things he is yet to do, in the minds not only of a clique, but of the general world of readers. No one now would shake their heads if you said of "our Robert Browning," This man will go far yet. Soon after his play came my circuit, where I became a performer on provincial boards in a very small scale, and since that has come Term and some family visiting, &c., so that I have not seen our Poet since. But I am sure in whatever way he regards it, whether as a failure or a partial success, the effect on him will be the same, viz. to make him still to work, work, work.

Naturally enough, in going down the alphabet comes Carlyle — who after long silence has just emitted a book called "Past and Present"—a wild Isaiah-like denunciation of the self-seeking money-worshipping of the age—more gloomy, more fierce, more fuliginous than anything he has ever

yet written. He makes out his title-page by taking first the chronicle of an old Monk, Jocelyn of St. Edmunds Bury, who wrote in Henry 3d [*sic*] and Richard 1st's time, and then, as you may fancy, tries to see the doings of that age as they were to be seen by the old Monks of St. Edmund, and makes a running commentary of his own upon the single-mindedness and devoutness of that age. That is his Past—the Present he makes wild work indeed with. We are all, as you may conceive, given over to shams, to Unveracity, to Mammonism and Flunkeyism (a new coinage to me at least, and with him a favourite one)—there is no help or hope for us, unless we, each man for himself, will cease to be a Flunkey and resolve to be a hero, &c.; with all the rest, as you may fancy, in a strain of style more hugely, enormously, chaotic and volcanic than he has ever yet vexed the ears of "Dilettantism" with. I am sorry for this. I think the book would have done a million times the good it is ever likely to do now, if he had not, as though wantonly and with

horse-laughter, driven away from his pages all who have ever sworn by Addison and rejoiced in the harmony of Robertson. In fact even to much more tolerant people the rude Titan horseplay of the style is a positive nuisance—the man has a giant's strength, but he need not be always gambolling with a giant's clumsiness. The large-limbed, rough might of a Jötun is well—but the well-knit compact force of a Greek athlete, or even an English boxer, is better—does more with less noise—less sprawling and shambling: in fact, as his object is to do good, he ought to write more directly and plainly—more as he did when he wrote the life of Burns. Nevertheless the "old Norse thinker" does speak out about the present interest and thoughts of men—he tells the "game-preserving aristocracy" that he, though a Conservative, would not uphold the Corn Laws if he were the Conservative party for £100,000 an hour, no not for Potosi and Golconda—nay he speaks out about many things: Colonisation, he says, must be carried on on the grand scale—

we must bring our Colonies as close to us by ships—as practicable of access by ships, as his back woods are to the American—them too we must educate, &c. In fact the practical upshot of his book is this: Do away with your Corn Laws at once, Justice has doomed that: you will then have twenty years free from starvation in which you may do much, nay all that must be done to save your Empire from ruin. Altogether it is in a practical way the most satisfactory thing Carlyle has done, and will of course furnish material for thought to be wrought up into fresh forms as speeches, leading articles, reviews, &c., by the "clever men" and the "rising men" of the day—who in Parliament and elsewhere are, to an extent that is quite amusing, gaining a reputation for themselves by expounding Carlyleism into the vulgar tongue. By-the-bye, you remember I used to say of Charles Buller that he was one of the ablest men we had—he has just spoken a speech on Colonisation which exhausts the subject and of which I think most highly. Roebuck has taken the

line of upholding the present Government—I suppose because it is a Government and a strong one; he is just made Queen's Counsel, and people generally talk of his being appointed to some Colonial situation or other. Brougham has, I should think, caused poor Dowson deeper and more agonising paroxysms of scorn and contempt than can be at all compatible with his comfortable digestion. He has far outspat all his former venom upon the luckless heads of honourable friend after honourable friend, and outslavered all his former slavering of the illustrious Duke. As to general politics, our grand theme still is Corn Law. The theory of the present state of things with regard to it seems to be this. Peel is as firmly convinced as any Repealer of the badness of his own law, but he is too much afraid of "the Country Gentleman," and too ashamed of the indecorum of a hasty change, to listen to any alteration for a year—so that employment is to diminish, population to increase, and hatred to our institutions to accumulate in the "poor labouring

and manufacturing mind" for another long year, in order to gratify a Minister's notions of parliamentary etiquette, and indulge his miserable parliamentary fears. By-the-bye I must not forget in this *mélange* of all news to tell you that Charles Dickens doles out monthly numbers of a Nickleby tale called "Martin Chuzzlewit" to about 50,000 monthly consumers. I persist, in spite of all the pertinacity of such resolute admirers as Maria and others, that the thing is a falling off—there is less fun than there used to be, less incident, and next to no interest. Instead of Sam Weller's good things we have much too often only Charles Dickens' fine things; and though there can be no doubt about the elegant composition and sometimes elevated, though too often fantastical and would-be profound or would-be German, tone of the thought contained in his introductory and meditative passages, yet I would give whole volumes of them for one page of inimitable Sam. I also fancy I notice an endeavour to attain originality of character by departing from probability—as in the case

of Mark, &c.; altogether the book seems to me more in the style of M'Clise than Wilkie, which Dickens ought never to have left. But, of course, these will be infallible elements in your library at Nelson, so I forbear. Not true! don't believe it—nor that nonsense about Carlyle. No.

And now to tell you of my own doings. I have left not much room for them, because they are very unvaried and therefore very unnarratable. But I know you will be glad to hear that I have made some beginnings at law, which though but beginnings have been generally successful. Besides some few things in town, I had divers prisoners to defend and to prosecute on the circuit; in fact, have been exactly doing what Sheridan described as the circuit practice of every young lawyer, viz. picking up small fees and impudence. On one occasion I had to get up on the sudden and make an impromptu of half an hour in defence of a fellow. The brief had been given to an acquaintance of mine—a regular criminal lawyer; but he was sent for into the Civil

Court just as the case was called on, and he supplicated me to assist him, as one or two of those about him had refused, and I did not like the poor devil to lose a chance. I got up, and on cross-examination made the prosecutrix and the other two witnesses show that they knew nothing about it, and then addressed myself to the jury and had the pleasure of getting off my man, against whom the charge had been trumped up for money. The men about me congratulated me on my speech. I was pleased at finding that I was not in the least nervous and that I had no want of words. Since that I have had two or three things of a similar kind to do, and I believe have done them creditably, so that the law prospect begins a little to brighten, though, of course, anything like remunerating employment seems nearly as far as ever; but the fact is every man at the bar who has not a strong connexion must wait years, some more, some less, according to luck, before they begin to make an income. Compared to some who started at the same time I have no reason

to complain, compared to others I am far distanced. Time, however, is sure to bring these matters to their level. Meanwhile I am working with might and main, and I believe have a patient power of endurance about me which will enable me to go on a long while upon a very minimum of encouragement. Meanwhile I like the profession; the men improve as you go amongst them. Looked at from a distance as a mere muster of fellows in horse-hair wigs and black gowns, who are sworn to spend their lives in carrying out the petty rules of a crabbed science, and waste their best years in longing expectation of that which, when it comes, is only a gilded slavery, more severe (always excepting the gilding) than any corporeal hard labour gone through in treadmills—looked at thus, indeed, they might well seem to be a body of men with whom a mind "enlarged by reading and reflection" could never have more than a very imperfect sympathy: but once among them and of them the whole scene changes; you find yourself among many young men whose

ardour for literature, for poetry, for reflection is just as strong as your own, but who, like yourself, from the pressure of a thousand different circumstances have been led, lured, or driven into the only calling which seems in modern times to give a man any reasonable chance of rising above other men by the profession of learning or eloquence, or a feeling for what is noblest in man. I do not find practically that there is any want of sympathy among the younger barristers for what may be classed generally as "literary pursuits"—in fact, provided law is not sacrificed to these, they always procure for their possessor a higher degree of respect. Then, again, I think there is no man of a dreamy or unpractical nature who will not find his mind itself—all his powers—strengthened materially by the study and practice of the law; and the feeling of increasing strength, whether of body or mind, is always in itself pleasant. So that on the whole I have come entirely to the conclusion that for me, being what I am, in "this England of ours," being what it

is, law is of all pursuits the one best adapted for me. Therefore at law I work and shall work, I hope effectually. One awkward thing about it is that it takes one so much from home. I am in chambers four evenings out of every week, and on circuit twelve weeks out of every year; but then, to make up for that, there is a three months' vacation, which no other profession can offer; ∴ the same conclusion follows, that law is the best profession, Q.E.D. I have not seen very much lately of any of our mutual friends. We dined at Baker's some month or so back and had a delightful evening: by-the-bye, Baker was kind enough to entrust me with a brief in the Sheriff's Court, in which I did not, unluckily, succeed in getting a verdict, though I did not fail, I hope, with any discredit. Such is my narrative—as I promised you, flat enough; in return for it you must send a thoroughly good practical account of all doings in Nelson, specially as to the hardness of the life, and of course also as to its pleasantness; in fact, a picture of Nelson done to the life,

with yourself as the most prominent figure in the foreground. I was thinking whether I had any friend at the Antipodes except yourself, but alas! now that poor W. Young is gone I have no one but you to send the heartfelt greeting of your afft. friend,

JOSEPH ARNOULD.

God bless you, old fellow. Maria sends her kind love; we talk of you oftener than you imagine.

J. ARNOULD TO A. DOMETT

18 VICTORIA SQUARE, PIMLICO.

Did I not know you, my dear Domett, so well as I do I should feel rather hurt at your not having written to me; but I fear, from what I have heard from others, that I can guess the reason only too well, viz. that you have not as yet anything to tell me which you honestly think I should be glad to hear. If this be so, however, do not let any feeling of the sort prevent you any longer from writing. I have seen your letters to others, and from them know well

that you have met with much to annoy and distress you in Nelson, not from any direct complaint made, but from facts stated; and I am sure you do not need any assurance of mine that none of your many friends here, and I never knew a man with more, felt more deeply than myself for the shock you must have felt in poor Wm. Young's death. And for this sad affair of the lameness the only consolatory remark I have heard touching that was made by my wife, who, after bitter laments, broke out with "Well, never mind! now he'll be obliged to study; and after all, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, and Byron were all lame." Her firm conviction is accordingly that it is the most fortunate-unfortunate thing that could have happened. I should be of the same opinion if I thought it could at all contribute to driving you back into the good old land. You cannot now, my dear fellow, want mountains and morasses to ramble over; I am sure the length of the Strand measured backwards and forwards daily would do for you as it does for me. Why the devil won't

you come back amongst us? Look you: I have been working at law like a whole team of horses for the last two years. I have got enough *knowledge* and shall soon I hope have enough *practice* to take a pupil. Come and be my pupil. I would keep you hard at work—I would give you the best plan of study—we would attend Courts together and go circuit together. I have no family, and more room in my house than I want—you could take up your quarters with us, till you had suited yourself elsewhere. I am sure your connection would rally round you, and you really have a first-rate law connection in and about London. Now this is not chimerical—try it. I tell you what I will offer you in all fairness: if, at the end of the year, you don't like it, I engage to pay your passage home and back again—but I am confident it would do this time. You are only—what is it? four and thirty, or not so much. (I put it at the outside.) I daily see men called to the bar much later. I will not promise you a career, I have given up all that nonsense for myself

long ago—after thirty it seems puerile to waste life in fidgeting about being glorious; but I tell you what I will promise you, and that is a *livelihood*, gained in a pursuit as pleasant as any other by which men continue to live, and gained in company of men who, by their general high feeling, information, and freedom from petty jealousy, are as agreeable companions as one can reasonably desire. Then for God's sake come back, my dear fellow! To have asked you *not to go* would have been as wild and hopeless as to request the Spring tide with compliments to defer its daily flow; but now you have been, you have seen, you have learnt all that experience can teach, and I wager anything that in your heart of hearts you pronounce the whole thing a failure. Well, what is there to tie you with your thirty-three years of life to a damned dull collection of log huts in the Antipodes, while you might have a very decent room *chez moi* as long as you liked to stay—a year's pupilage in law without payment of your 100 guineas, and I would introduce you to some as really good-hearted,

wide-minded fellows as you would meet anywhere. Now mind, all this is on the supposition, which I may have mistakenly formed, of your being discontented in New Zealand—if I am wrong, you are to blame in having done nothing towards enlightening me as to your real state; and besides, if you are realising *there* the hopes which you used, as I then fancied insincerely, to proclaim *here*, you will, of course, smile scornfully at the change I am proposing in the simplicity of my heart. I only ask you not to let any feeling of apprehension as to what friends here may think have any weight with you. I know enough of that to feel assured that there would only be one sentiment in the heart of all your friends, that, viz., of joy at your return; and as to those who are not friends, a man at thirty-three is too old to care a rush for what *they* think or say. So ponder this matter in your mind. If you think well of it, reply by taking an early passage home, and resolve to work *desperately* at law, as I am doing now, certain that it will pay sooner or later.

You would get on at the bar *faster* than I should, *simply* (so don't think I want to flatter) and *solely* through your family connection. I have not any such connection, and consequently am creeping up the hill at a very slow pace, but I hope, and in fact am confident, at a sure one. I have not yet made 50 guineas in any one year; but I am increasing my legal knowledge very respectably, and whenever it has fallen upon me to address the Court, which I have three or four times done, in defending prisoners, &c., I have found an easy flow of words and plenty of modest assurance. But enough of all this.

Browning and sister, Dowson and wife, dined with us a week back. Browning read us your letter, a capital one (I could not help wishing I had one for myself). Of course there was abundant talk of you, and your health with all the honours was drunk as of course. A variety of little petty circumstances has prevented my seeing so much of Browning as I otherwise should (the fact is I am very much absorbed in law, and getting less equal to converse with

him on our old topics perhaps); but every time I see him I like him more, he is so thoroughly and out and out *right* in heart and head. Your advice to him as to his language, rhythm, &c., was admirable, and he seemed *really* grateful for it:—"now this," he said, "is what one wants; how few men there are who will give you this." He read it out to us himself; I can assure you there was not in his manner the slightest semblance of anything approaching to offence; on the contrary, he seemed to feel what he said, "How friendly this is." I told you in my last all about the play and the miserable pettinesses and villainies of Macready—I think Browning seems thoroughly to have left behind him any soreness or annoyance which for the time no doubt must have been caused by such extraordinary malignity. He is working as he always is, but at what I know not. I shall be most anxious to see his next book. I was very interested with all you said about Tennyson. Browning and I both exclaimed, "I was sure he would like 'Locksley Hall' best." "The Plump

Head Waiter at the Cock" would also, I knew, be a favourite, but I don't know whether I should have hit upon the "Talking Oak." What think you of "Godiva," "Dora," and the two or three descriptions in the "Gardener's Daughter"? I own that bit of Flemish landscape (beginning "Not wholly in the busy world nor yet Beyond it lies the garden that I love") seems to me the most perfect piece of word-painting I ever met with. Like you, I cannot understand his omissions in the present edition, and regret them greatly. Browning says he is living in seclusion in a remote watering-place, seeing no man, and having his letters directed (of all conceivable beings) to a muffin-man. The comfortable cockneyism of such a functionary in a remote seaside place gives the whole tale in my eyes an apocryphal air. If 'tis true, 'tis pity, for the very thing Tennyson most wants is more intercourse with his fellow-creatures. One grand thing gained is that he has learnt that poetry consists in thought and passion more than in mere beauty of metre or airiness of

imagination, and that the commonest things, people, and situations are full of poetry to the poet. What a pity he has not the intense vigour of Robert Browning. I still believe as devoutly as ever in "Paracelsus," and find more wealth of thought and poetry in it than [in] any book except Shakespeare. The more one reads the more miraculous does that book seem as the work of a man of five-and-twenty. Browning's conversation is as remarkably good as his books, though so different: in conversation anecdotical, vigorous, showing great thought and reading, but in his language most simple, energetic, and accurate. From the habit of good and extensive society he has improved in this respect wonderfully. We remember him as hardly doing justice to himself in society; now it is quite the reverse—no one could converse with him without being struck by his great conversational power—he relates admirably; in fact, altogether I look upon him as *to be* our foremost literary man. You had not received the play when you wrote, but I know

you will think it in parts as grand as anything in Webster or Beaumont and Fletcher. Browning always reminds me a great deal of Webster, whose "Duchess of Malfi" and "Vittoria Corombona" I have been rereading lately with the highest pleasure: in vigour, grandeur, and fire they are much alike. Of course in intellect Browning has the superiority, just as Webster certainly beats him in plot and stage effect, and also, to my thinking, in dramatic style, though in this respect I think the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon" was a great improvement on anything since "Paracelsus." The "Revolt [*sic*] of the Druses," I confess, hardly pleased me so much as I expected—it was too full of the old faults of style, and the object not plain enough. "Dramatic Lyrics," on the other hand, filled me with delight and enthusiasm, which worked itself off in a very hastily written epistle of very schoolboy verses, which I cannot help fancying gave Browning a bad opinion of my sincerity, though they expressed exactly what I actually felt at the time and still feel with regard to

the extraordinary beauty and power of the "Dramatic Lyrics." That is almost the only deviation into rhyme of which I have been guilty since I saw you; and in fact I believe I have now such a just appreciation of what poetry is and requires that I shall be saved from the ridicule of adding another to the metrical prosers of the day. Still I have as great an interest as ever in all that concerns the tuneful tribe, and would feel my own happiness more increased by Browning's achieving a yet greater and more decisive triumph than he has yet realised than by any other event in literature, always except indeed that of your bursting out upon us with some great, deeply-reasoned, grandly-conceived work—the birth of your enforced leisure among your potato acres. By-the-bye, *do*, whenever you write, send me a vivid description, such as you only can give, of your habitations, your habits, and your friends. I want to know all about the ways of the place—all about Richardson,[1] of

[1] Probably Major (afterwards Sir John) Richardson, Speaker of the Legislative Council from 1869 to 1879, and a man universally loved and respected in the colony.

whose ability I have formed the highest opinion, and about any other brave, clear-headed, warm-hearted Englishman or man you may have been thrown together with. You must know I am very, and not unnaturally, curious about all these things. I have nothing to tell, for my life is monotonous and unvaried as possible, but you have everything. We are living together just as we were when you left us, very quietly, but very delightfully; I have been working hard all my last vacation, and have only left London for about ten days out of the three months. One of the most delightful days I spent anywhere was at Woodford with the Dowsons; nothing could be more beautiful than their cottage and its situation, nothing pleasanter than their way of life. We were most charmed with our visit; the children I like beyond any it has been my lot to meet with, they have so much frank ingenuousness and intelligence. Freddy, the boy, I like especially—the little one, without humbug, is like you—very like for such a little creature.

At nine-and-twenty one does not swear eternal friendship so easily as at nineteen, but I have already formed many most agreeable acquaintances at the bar, and one whom I may, as times go, call a friend. His name is Lydekker, a Cambridge man of about your standing—a man of sound, discerning judgment, great kindness of heart, and more width of mind than is usual amongst lawyers. He is not a brilliant or showy man, but sound-headed and hearted with a warm spice of humour—altogether a reliable man. He works very hard, and our pursuits agreeing we see a good deal of each other.—Was Creasy at Cambridge in your time, or Pearson, both of Trinity? They are also clever men and open minded: in fact I have been quite surprised at the amount of general information and love of literature amongst even the hard-working barristers: altogether I have become fond of my profession, and I am sure you would so too if you but come home and work. I honestly believe that, with your connection, you might be making £100 a year by law at the end of

the third year, which, poor as it is, is yet more than you would make by a score of years potato-planting, and which would infallibly lead to ten times as much by the end of the tenth year.

But I find I must hurry rapidly to a close, as the ship sails earlier than I expected. Maria is quite well, and we are as happy as possible : many and many are the long evenings we spend in talking about you. She desires her kindest love, and bids me say she would write if she thought you cared about hearing from her. I send eight "Examiners," and will send them regularly. —God bless you from your true friend,

JOSEPH ARNOULD.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

NEW CROSS, HATCHAM, SURREY,
Oct. 9, 1843.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—Once again I am to "get a letter ready," writes C. Dowson, seeing that a ship is ready for it—and again I must go thro' the series of hopes and

anxieties and good wishes about you, which are as fresh and true as the first time I expressed them, and felt what a poor kind of expression it was, or how poor a hand *I* was, and am, at it. All I want to give you is assurance of my being the very R. B. and ugly rest of a name you left behind—so shall you find me the sooner when you come back. I make no new friends, which sometimes seems a pity—but I strengthen myself with the old—find better and better reasons for the faith that was in me. You do not —that is, did not six months ago—write to me; but there is the best of reasons for it, I know.

We are all here, in the same quiet way. People read my works a little more, they say, and I have some real works here, in hand; but now that I could find it in my heart to labour earnestly, I doubt if I shall ever find it in my *head*, which sings and whirls and stops me even now, at this minute—an *evening* minute, by the way.

The most notable thing of the year has been, to me, the visit of Father Mathew to

London—this reverting to the simplest form of worship (for the converts are converts to his hand and voice and eye, and nothing beyond), all these men choosing to become *better* because he, who was standing there, better—he *bade* them so become; you should have seen it, as I did. I must write out my feeling on the subject in as plain prose as I can, somewhere and somehow, and send it you. I stood on the scaffold with him, and heard him preach, beside.

I saw Carlyle three or four days back: he had just returned from Scotland, where *he*, too, had his narrow escape from becoming lame—his horse having fallen with him, bruising his ankle, &c. He is now busy at "that cursed Oliver Cromwell"—meantime, his "Past and Present" continues to figure in reviews and newspapers—which of these do you see?

C. Dowson and Mrs. D. have just come up for the winter from Woodford. C. as vigilant of theatrical polity as ever: he quotes a new play that came out and went in, the other night, at Covent Garden—but

nothing more can be done at present with plays; yet something may with actors, for true as I write to you, a week or two since, the new man who is to figure at that very Covent Garden, rehearsed his two capital parts in my presence, Hamlet and Othello —and was persuaded by me to "cut Shakespeare," as he termed it, so *that* misery has been saved an audience that might have been! I saw your Father at Melvill's, *yesterday* only, and wondered at his well-looking. Arnould I called on, but did not see, the other day.

I say this little and have done: I don't suppose I should say much more, if you rang the bell while I write, and they called me down to you, and we sate together again. Saying, or writing—what is it, or what does it? When I was at Woodford in the summer I got hold of certain albums and got all your verses copied: there they are, six inches from my desk—"Glee for Winter" —so good! and "Hougoumont,"[1] and all,

[1] Both of these were reprinted in "Flotsam and Jetsam" (1877), and are included in the selection published in Miles' "Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century."

indeed. Write more, and justify my prophecy then and now.

My head is really unmanageable, and I must leave off. God bless you, my dear Domett.—I am ever and always, yours faithfully,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
Nov. 8, 1843.

Dear Domett,—"How did my heart rejoice to hear My friends devoutly say, A letter doth at length appear," and so on, only altered, from Dr. Watts! But don't you write such long letters, for you will send me no such sheetful in a hurry again — that I can never expect: and I want to hear about you often, if but in scraps and notelets. I wish you had said more about yourself, and more encouragingly. But I take refuge now in what I used to deprecate once, your habit of painting everything *en noir:* as long as

you can *swim*, for instance, how should you be "crippled"? All the same, if *black* is the colour about you, and may not be softened away, take ship, in heaven's name, and come here in the cursed six months! There you walk past our pond-rail (picking up one of the fallen horse-chesnuts), and now our gate-latch clicks, and now——

It's "and *then*," unluckily—and I have *now* to answer your questions—or, better, thank you heartily for your criticism, which is sound as old wine. The fact is, in my youth (*i.e.* childhood) I wrote *only* musically—and after stopped all that so effectually that I even now catch myself grudging my men and women their half-lines, like a parish overseer the bread-dole of his charge. But you will find a difference, I think, in what has reached you already, even, and *more* in what *shall* reach you, D.V. I really feel it awkward to beg you to say your mind, and at length, on what I send—so INESTIMABLE a favour is it, which those quiet words require!

I must have told you in a former letter[1] that the critique on me is by Horne. A capital passage, better than most things in the book it noticed, was struck out by a certain Dr. Worthington, *who inserted that miserable piece of spite about Mr. Kemble* in Hunt's article on Tennyson, to Hunt's horror and (protested) disgust (I mean, he protested to Kemble against it). Hunt's criticism is neither kind nor just, I take it — he don't understand that most of Tennyson's poems are *dramatic* — utterances coloured by an imaginary speaker's moods. Thus "the mermaid" is not purely sea-woman enough for him—too coquettish and conscious, and like a girl of our own *fancying* "the only blessed life, the watery": whereas, it *is* just that, a *girl*, looking characteristically at what might be viewed after many another fashion — Ariel's, for instance. It oddly happens that I met two days ago Mr. Heraud whom you inquired about — not having "come across" him these two or

[1] See above, p. 50.

three or four years. He is alive, *memor tui* (noticed you, he says, in "Fraser"), and wholly bent on a new Puseyite-repelling magazine, and as new a scheme for the renovation of the drama (God keep Bedlam off us!) by the help of the *Aristocracy*. They are to subscribe only, and *we* (for he asked me, plump) to—give our names! I have not seen Carlyle lately; I shall tell him all you say, knowing it will delight him. You speak of his portrait: it happens that I have been employed to ask him (or his wife, rather) for the loan of one—and, says he (reports the wife), "If any man or body of men wants a likeness of me let him apply to Lawrence and arrange with him for it: for L. is the only man living who has any of the elements of my face *within* him — and is besides a very fine little fellow." I quote from her note before me. I am not without hope of being able to send you an engraving from this "vera effigies" at the year's end. But Arnould and Dowson — that passes my

power! I dined with both a week ago; we drank your health, and talked of you, till your ears must have tingled in your hut! 'Tis worth while running away to be so wished for again. All here desire their best regards to you.—Yours ever,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
Jan. 8, 1844.

My dear Domett,—This, which I had meant to be a long letter (when I saw by the *Times* that a ship was just leaving) will be short, for somebody called and hindered me. I will write again, but must say how unutterably glad and thankful I and all your friends are, that you are out of the horrible story of the *massacre*.[1] But what melancholy work for you—most of the poor fellows must have

[1] The Wairau massacre (see above, p. 11), of which the news had just reached England, six months after the event.

been your friends: what can you be doing but one of two things — either "coming forward," and supplying the place of one or other of these "public characters" (as our papers call them) — or picking-up potato-crop and packing-up movables— and coming back to us. Oh, the day! which *day* was six months ago and more; and as you are not here, it is too clear you are *there*, and all must be made the best of! C. Dowson was with me the other day; he thought you would not "come forward"—I differed with him.

I shall receive some letter, at least some news of you, long ere you get this—but *do* write, though but a line or less.

News here — none. Melville is going to leave, to everybody's sorrow and, I suppose, the saving of his life—so ill is he, in looks at least. I put up a Review that notices me, with this, as an advertisement at the beginning tells you what little I am about—but I meditate better things, of which more in my next. Alas

that in "meditating" these things we grow grey and greyer—and at greyest I shall be ever yours, my dear Domett,

R. BROWNING.

All here send their perfect remembrance, and truest regard to you.

That the album containing these letters was essentially a Browning-album, not a collection of letters from the "Camberwell set" in general, is shown by the fact that at this point Domett has transcribed some extracts relating to Browning from a letter of Arnould's, dated July 28, 1844, instead of inserting the letter itself.

J. ARNOULD TO A. DOMETT

July 28, 1844.

Browning is ever active; from one height scaling another. Like his own "gier-eagle strenuously beating the silent, boundless

regions of the sky,"[1] he is, more often than he should be, amongst the clouds that hide the majesty of his flight and the supreme dominion of his swoop from the gaze of the world at the mountain base, who are however beginning to take more note of his movements. Horne (Orion Horne) has done him good service, in a book of his (H's.) called "The Spirit of the Age"—a menagerie of modern lions and lionesses whereof Horne acts, not inefficiently, as showman. Friend Robert he stirs up to good effect, and makes him roar out very nobly some of the grandest passages in "Paracelsus"—

[1] The reference is to the fine passage in "Paracelsus" ("Poetical Works," 1868, vol. i, pp. 57, 58) :—

"Be sure that God
Ne'er dooms to waste the strength He deigns impart!
Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once
Into the vast and unexplored abyss,
What full-grown power informs her from the first,
Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
The silent, boundless regions of the sky!"

"Gier-eagle" is the spelling of the earlier editions, altered to "geier-eagle" in the "Collected Works" of 1888 and 1896.

the exact passages I think which you or I should have chosen if we had the same task to accomplish. Do you remember F. A. Ward? He is now sub-editor of *Hood's Magazine*, and in this capacity has acted well in wrenching from our Robert several little morceaux,[1] sketches by a master, which have appeared in said Magazine, and being more exoteric than even his *sketches* generally are, may do him some further service with the public.

. . . . . .

I am sure I need not say how often we talk of you or how much we all miss you here. At Browning's especially you are a constant topic; nothing can exceed the kindness—the affection with which he

[1] "The Laboratory," "Claret and Tokay," "Garden Fancies," "The Boy and the Angel," "The Tomb at St. Praxed's" (as that well-known poem was at first named), and "The Flight of the Duchess," all appeared originally in *Hood's Magazine* in 1844–45. Of the latter Browning says that it was "given to poor Hood in his emergency at a day's notice" ("Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.," i. 58). Only the first nine sections, however, were so published, "the beginning of a story written some time ago" (*ib.*).

speaks of you—in fact he is a true friend; he has an energy of kindness about him which never slumbers. In me he seems to take a thoroughly friendly interest, and it is solely by his means that I have obtained an entrance at last into Periodical Literature, which I have long been endeavouring through less zealous friends to procure. He is a noble fellow. His life so pure, so energetic, so simple, so laborious, so loftily enthusiastic. It is impossible to know and not to love him. Sarianna, as my wife now always calls her, we are both very much attached to; she is marvellously clever — such fine clear animal spirits — talks much and well, and yet withal is so simply and deeply good-hearted that it is a real pleasure to be with her.[1]

[1] A description of Miss Browning which will be recognised by all who had the privilege of her acquaintance as true in every respect up to the last moment of her long life.

BROWNING AND DOMETT

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

New Cross,
July 31, 1844.

My dear Domett,—A ship sails to-morrow, I see, and I must write a line or two, with all the old misery which years ago I attributed to one Sordello (do you remember him? I have not opened the book of his doing since I returned your copy—and all of it is clean gone),—I say, the misery I made him feel at "inadequate vehicles" of feeling — of which this letter-writing always seemed to me the worst and is now got down to something absolutely horrible. I know nothing, next to nothing, about you—how you thrive, if you are well, or hope to get on, or get off—but I have all the old true love for you, and ever shall have. I got a newspaper a month ago (as did Arnould—but he will write), and shall have a letter some day, please Providence. Arnould let me look over a letter to him, which came to his great joy one day while,

or just before, I was with him, so that I got your news, and in part your prospects, and all those clever and graphic pictures of Nelson-life—and plenty of kind notices of me, into the bargain. I see more of the Arnoulds than of old, and am more and more happy in their acquaintance and friendship. They were here only two or three days ago, and truly "your worship was the last man in our thoughts," for out of the coach-window did he renew his assurance that he would not let the *Caledonia* leave without a letter in charge. I don't think I sent you a copy of my last play—"Colombe": here you shall have it—but I feel myself so much stronger, if flattery not deceive, that I shall stop some things that were meant to follow, and begin again. I really seem to have something fresh to say. In all probability, however, I shall go to Italy first (Naples and Rome), for my head is dizzy and wants change. I never took so earnestly to the craft as I think I shall—or may, for these things are with God.

BROWNING AND DOMETT

A very interesting young poet has flushed into bloom this season. I send you his "soul's child"—the contents were handed and bandied about, and Moxon was told by the knowing ones of the literary turf that Patmore was "safe to win"; so Moxon relented from his stern purpose of publishing no verse on his own account, and did publish this[1]—whereat he looks somewhat biliously just now, for the prôneurs and helping hands aforesaid have unaccountably hung back of a sudden, and poor Patmore is, in a manner, *planté là*—only, of course, in the detestable trade sense of the word, for "Lilian" could never be other than a great and—for a man of twenty—wonderful success under any circumstances. The imitation of Tennyson is, rather, a choosing Tennyson's "mode of the lyre," as who should say, hearing a mode was in favor, "I can adopt that, too"; but he will make more and meddle less in good time, it is to

[1] A small collection of poems, chiefly narrative, which attracted some little attention in a very limited circle, but never even distantly approached the popular success of "The Angel in the House."

be hoped. In society he is all modesty and ingenuousness. A certain Ebenezer Jones vented a wild book[1]—abounding in beauty, tho'—I want to get and send it to you. I send Horne's book, of which you must have heard or seen much in the Reviews. And now, having said nothing—and wishing you to consider these scratches but as so many energetic "kickings of the feet" (such as those by which John Lilburne "signified his meaning" when they gagged his jaws at the pillory), and that what they mean is God bless you—do remember me for, Yours ever, R. B.

All here are well and send best regards and wishes to you. I noticed your brother's fine energetic face at Chapel last Sunday. Dowson and his house I have not heard of lately, they being at Woodford.

[1] "Studies of Sensation and Event" (1843), containing poems full, as Rossetti said, of "vivid disorderly power," but full also of faults of violence and crudity which repelled the public and the ordinary critics.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
Feb. 23, 1845.

My dear Domett,—I wrote to you about the end of last July, and mentioned, I believe, that I was going to Italy. Soon after, I did go (to Naples, by sea), and at Rome, to my great delight, the first of your two last letters was sent me (in *substance*) by my sister, who *abstracts* very well. I returned to England in the middle of December, and, a month ago, came newspapers and a letter, which I did not acknowledge earlier for want of a ship your way. I write now, with a pleasant half-belief that writing is no use in the world, and that you will be *here* when this present is sorrowfully pitched into the unclaimed box at Nelson; for you *must* be intending to come back as fast as possible. Law at Nelson!—all the bitter, and none of the sweets which time and prescription, and sociality, and classicality of a sort, and *lucri odor*, help to wring out of London

Law-Life! Do come back — the reasons are too many and obvious for me to urge them; and we are all in a cry, all your friends here. I cannot even write legibly—so oddly it feels that I should be at pains to point out to you what you must be seeing like a great wall before you! Arnould (that is, Mrs. Arnould) tells me something about a crop of potatoes, and net expenses, and loss—horrible! Arnould is a happiness to see and know. Law does him no harm in the world; and I send, with this, a Review with an article of his—"Rabelais"—which I know you will be delighted with as I have been. Come and do likewise! You will find no change . . . in this room, where I remember you so well. I turned my head, last line, to see if it was you came up with hat above the holly hedge. Poor Dowson, though, you would find sadly grieved by the misfortune he has had—I have not seen him yet, poor fellow. Your verses (to talk about something else) are capital, and hit no harder, I dare say, than the case requires. I sent them to Arnould,

You wrote rather querulously about his silence. If he has been silent (for I don't know), his real love is, and has been, loud enough on all occasions. He wanted to *starve* YOU into writing, most likely; so with his wife—I and you have no stauncher friends.

All you say about my poems greatly pleases me, and should profit. I do my best at all times—and really hope to be doing better already. The literary gossip you are benignant about, I can furnish but scantily—there is nothing doing, or announcing itself as to be done, except Carlyle's "Life of Cromwell," of which he is going to publish the *prolegomena* in the shape of "Letters and Speeches," with annotations—for, he says, if he can get people to read *them*, they will save him much trouble in telling them whether they have judged wisely of Cromwell or no. Himself seems to entertain a boundless admiration for the man. I spent this day fortnight's evening with Carlyle, and never remember him more delightful; the intensity of his Radicalism, too, is exquisite. He has a remarkable

brother, Dr. C.—physician—whom I know also and who was there—a man like and unlike him. What did you think of Patmore's little book? Some things were very beautiful—and yet, it seems that while I was away there appeared a brutal paper in *Blackwood*, of the old kind, which had the old almost-fabulous effect—the poor fellow despairs, and the sale of his book stops short, whereat Moxon smiles grimly with a super-*Ossianic* joy of grief, and says calmly, "I published *that* one book at my own risk—when I publish another . . ." The worst is, the *father* of Patmore it is, not himself, these critics want to hurt—he having been the second in a noted duel which ended in the death of Scott, the Editor of the *London Mag.*, about twenty years ago, or more, and probably before the son was born. Patmore, Senior, could have prevented the duel, they say—which is easily said. I wanted to introduce the son to an influential critic at a party one night, and "No," said he, "because of that bloody-minded father"—who stood by, silent in his white cravat, and

grateful to me for speaking to "his boy." Are not these things fit to make an apostle swear? But there have come out some divine things by Miss Barrett,[1] whose first book you liked, I remember. If you *don't* come, after all, I must send them.

If you will write articles for reviews, like this of Arnould's, or lighter, or heavier, or verse, or "worse" (as C. Lamb said), I can go between now, knowing more editors, &c., than I did. I occasionally do something for poor Hood, who is dying fast, and shall have some poetry in his next magazine. Do you ever see it? His own contributions are admirable—I mean his verses. One, Waterloo Bridge, is alone in its generation, I think; and the "Haunted House" of No. 1 was of admirable power.

[1] The two volumes of Miss Barrett's "Poems," which first gave her an assured place among the foremost and best-known poets of the day, were published in August 1844. It will be remembered that it was in January 1845 that Browning (encouraged thereto by John Kenyon) wrote her a letter of enthusiastic gratitude for these two volumes which "threw her into ecstacies." The "first book" is "The Seraphim and other Poems" of 1838.

The papers will tell you of the shocking end of poor Laman Blanchard—a dear-tempered, clever (more than merely clever, as his little early red-covered blossom of a book showed), genial friend of everybody's. Nearly the last time I saw him he talked, as we walked homewards, about his wife—how he was all but dead of a fever once, and she nursed him (being, I think, his cousin), and as he just turned the edge of the grave, he said, quite naturally, and for all courtship—"Well, you know, when I get better we will marry, and go live at," &c. &c.; "and since then," he said, "she has saved my life a dozen times"—with more of it: now she has pulled him strangely into the grave after her. He was to come and see me here, but never did.

When I got your papers and last letter I spoke of them to your father at Chapel; he looks wonderfully well. My sister saw him too at Dowson's while I was away. How glad *he* will be to see you. But times are mending here—Peel turns Liberal, "with other delights." I ought to have said there

is a brilliant book on the East, "Eothen," by the quietest man I know, a barrister to boot! He thought, it appears, to get quietly rid of his recollections, and so to bar with a clear conscience; but fame caught him, and is like to keep him. He wrote too that article about the "Hareem" in the last *Quarterly*—not that I have seen it, but it is said to be very clever.

All here send their true love, and hope to see you as soon as may be. Ever, dear Domett, yours most faithfully,

R. Browning

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
Sunday night, Nov. 23, 1845

Ah, dear Domett, how sad it is—here am I writing in reply to your last, some six or eight weeks after its receipt, and yet "availing myself of the earliest opportunity," "not letting next post slip," and complying with every form of good fellowship. "Mr. Earp's line" goes in and out of its place in

the newspapers, describing the truest zigzag, and his last packet's departure was put off a month—as I doubt not you know to your cost, laden as it must always be with the good wishes, put into words, of everybody who knows you. Your kindest of notes I got, and, thro' Arnould, a sight of *his* letter, and a bit of one as reported by C. Dowson—then all those capital *Examiners*, of which more in a moment—and, last of all, I manage every now and then to waylay your father; and if it were not for the purely selfish pleasure I confess to receiving on *my* part, I would cry aloud to you for due acknowledgment of the unequivocal delight I give him in easing his love in words. We met not long ago in Regent's Street—he, pacing alone and erect and straight on like the lion he is, on his return from a call on Alexander (whose report on the state of the eyes was quite favourable, he said)—and we "had it out" to hearts' content. For, though your last communications were in that desponding vein, we here, who knew of that recall of Fitzroy

and the appointment of Grey,[1] saw the sun unrisen on your far side, and made sure that your position would acquire value just in consequence of, and in proportion to, its present disadvantages, and that you may plainly turn the past couple of years to their legitimate profit, nor have to begin afresh this wearisome "going on adventures" to Ceylon or any such novel ground. Oh, but this distance—*this* undoes everything—and between what we know and what it has become worth by when *you* know it, what a difference! Here a day or two does so much! Chatterton can only go without food a certain number of hours, so he ends it, while at that moment some benevolent man (see his name in Southey, I think) is actually started on his way to Bristol "to inquire into the circumstances of, and, if necessary, assist the author." But do you,

[1] Captain R. Fitzroy was Governor of New Zealand from 1843 to 1845. He had considerable difficulties with both the colonists and the natives, and was ultimately recalled on a petition from the colony. This petition was drawn up by Domett. "Grey" is, of course, Sir George Grey.

"dear my friend and fellow-student," bear up like the good strong man you are. "Easy of me to say!" God bless you in any case, and whenever the whole world dies off by any chance, be sure you find your way to me, and we two will keep house in the merry grim spirit of poor Hood's last man but one, and the very last—do you remember? "All the world wide is dead beside, and we will be brother and brother" (and if I go on and end the couplet, "I've a liking for thee in my heart, as if we had come of one mother," it is not for the rhyme, no! but the sober reason).

I read those "leaders" with the greatest interest and satisfaction; they evidence so clearly your *available* talent, over above what I knew before: but now! You know best, *best*, and BEST again! but, that admitted, why not have taken that happy opportunity, the offered representativeship, and gone there and "jawed," if but in John Lilburne's method, who, when pilloried, or carted rather, "did justify himself to all men," whereon they gagged him and tied

his hands lest he should gesticulate and explain something by that; "yet did he protest against them by a stamping with his feet," to the no small comfort of his stout heart, I warrant. For see, out of this "stamping of the feet," though the hands were tied and the mouth stopped, came the very decided opinion here which has overset your foolish Governor. And *to-day* the affair of Despard[1]—the outrageous folly of that man—but you will see our papers for yourself, no doubt. It is most sickening to read or think of. Let me get out of it. I have not seen Dowson very lately, but he is well, I hear. Arnould is your heartiest of lovers and well wishers, and my admirable friend as ever, and his wife is a true piece of him. My father, mother, and sister are well, and send kindest regards (no figure—they have just enjoined me to send them). A glance at any side of a newspaper tells you all our book news. Herewith goes my new "Bell,"[2] "wishing what I write may be

[1] The repulse of a force under Col. Despard in an attack on a Maori "pah."

[2] No. vii., "Dramatic Romances."

read by your light." I send, too, a Review that may interest you at odd places. I saw Pritchard yesterday, full of this New Zealand news—always hoping and believing in you. God bless you, dear Domett. Write to me if but a line—as you could not help doing if you knew how it gratifies your ever affectionate R. B.

This letter, we happen to know, earned its writer a headache, for on that same Sunday evening Browning, writing to Miss Barrett, apologises for sending "but a word, for my head aches a little. I had to write a long letter to my friend at New Zealand, and now I want to sit and think of you and get well." The "word," before it was finished, was not very much shorter than the "long letter"; but the point of importance to observe is that we are now well within the period to which the correspondence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett belongs. Beginning with letters answering one another by return of post, and thickening until each wrote daily, in

spite of the visits, which also increased in frequency, through those critical twenty-one months, this intercourse may well be supposed to have occupied all his thoughts and all his time. Nevertheless the letters to his "friend at New Zealand" continued regularly as opportunity served, and no trace is shown in them of the new and absorbing interest which had entered into his life. Nor is there the least diminution in the keenness and warmth of his affection for his absent friend.

At this point, however, comes a brief reference to Browning in a letter of Arnould's, which is worth printing.

J. ARNOULD TO A. DOMETT

Nov. 24, 1845.

My dear Domett,—Here I am at eleven o'clock at night just returned from our friend Chorley's—a neighbour of ours in the Square—where I have been dining with Barry Cornwall and Browning; and as you may imagine, been enjoying a great treat.

Glorious Robert Browning is as ever, but more genial, more brilliant, and more anecdotical than when we knew him four years ago. . . .

To-night we have been talking much of you. Robert Browning especially speaks of you to every one.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
March 19, 1846.

My dear Domett,—There is news about your world in to-day's papers for everybody, and I hope, in some letter or other for somebody here, news of yourself; still I cannot wait to be sure, as the *Madras* sails directly, much as I long to hear that your own prospects brightened together with the Colony's on the departure of Fitzroy and advent of Grey. Your newspapers—you feel how *we* all feel when they come to hand and heart. Surely the new dynasty will avail itself of your services. Those "leaders" are capital —anybody can see that; I commended my

last-but-one batch to the notice of Forster, literally on the eve of the publishing that *Daily News* in which he was concerned with Dickens, &c. (you receive it, your father told me the other day), and he, Forster, said they would in all probability secure you for correspondent—but the whole concern went off impotently. Dickens got out of it after a headlong fashion, more polite than valiant, and though the paper in itself has gone on, I think, improving steadily (Forster for editor), yet like the Apostle "it dies daily"—the preliminary flourish of brass instruments only serving to render the after-quiet more profound. But at first I believed a good appointment might come of it, for the arrangements were all on the most liberal scale.

Arnould sends a letter, I know; he will have told whatever is to tell—good, admirable fellow that he is! I value his friendship more as the years get on—we never meet but we talk of you. His wife is really, and not figuratively, a part of him—so talks, and so wishes. Dowson gave one

of his old dinners (in, to me, a new *locale* for them, the City), and you were "in our flowing cups freshly remembered." Last Sunday week, I saw your father, who rejoiced my heart by an account of another kind of dinner at which you were done justice to, the report being unluckily in one of the *Examiners not* received by me—I am to see it, however.

This morning I went to Moxon's to see about the issue of my number 8, and last of this series at least. They (*two* plays,[1] to get done) will appear in a fortnight or so, and then I shall breathe for a month or two, God willing, and consider my ways. You received, of course, I trust, the last number with a letter. I don't think that at that time Landor's all too generous lines about it had appeared, My father having been at the pains of getting them printed, I can send a copy. The first thing to notice is the kindness, and after, the blindness of such praise; but, these acknowledged duly, surely one may remark on the happy epithet

[1] "Luria" and "A Soul's Tragedy."

"hale" as applied to Chaucer—and all is musical and vigorous. I was very much gratified—and perhaps, again gratified at *that*, in the consciousness of not being altogether indifferent, as might easily be. I never was much disturbed in my natural post of "most unintelligible of writers," nor, consequently, got a tithe of the notice book-makers get as a matter of course—yet my gettings, what all the unintelligibility and unpopularity in the world could not preserve me from getting—quite enough [it] has been, indeed! But one morning we may talk over our experiences—shall that not be? All here are well, and bid me put as much "best regards" as I can into the letter's end—but nobody has forgotten you by a shade. "Out of sight, out of mind"—so they malign the world where it least deserves!

God bless you, dear Domett—won't you write a line by next ship? Don't if it bores you, though—I quite understand, and always am yours affectionately,

R. Browning.

BROWNING AND DOMETT

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

New Cross, Hatcham, Surrey,
July 13, 1846.

My dear Domett,—I got as much of your very self as letter would hold, full two months ago—since then *Hope*, the ship, has been deferred and deferred as is characteristic. The five-months' inevitable voyage is bad enough without these stoppages and delays meantime and before. I have received *Examiners* in abundance. Can you remember what this letter is about which lies open here as fresh as if you had penned it yesterday? It is full of cautions and warnings as touching my well-being, mental and physical, all admirable of their kind; and I think that, on the whole, I have profited by them, turned them to practical account . . . for "laid them to heart" I *know* I have. As to the obscurity and imperfect expression, the last number of my "Bells," which you get with this, must stand for the best I could do, *four or five*

months ago, to rid myself of those defects—and if you judge I have succeeded in any degree, you will not fancy I am likely to relax in my endeavour now. As for the necessity of such endeavour I agree with you altogether: from the beginning, I have been used to take a high ground, and say, all endeavour elsewhere is thrown away. Endeavour *to think* (the real *thought*), to *imagine*, to *create*, or whatever they call it—as well endeavour to add the cubit to your stature! *Nascitur poeta*—and that conceded to happen, the one object of labour is naturally what you recommend to me, and I to myself—nobody knows better, with what indifferent success. But here is, without affectation, the reason why I have gone on so far although succeeding so indifferently: I felt so instinctively from the beginning that unless I tumbled out the dozen more or less of conceptions, I should bear them about forever, and year by year get straiter and stiffer in those horrible cross-bones with a long name, and at last parturition would be the curse indeed. Mine

was the better way, I do calmly believe, for at this moment I feel as everybody does who has *worked*—"in vain"? no matter, if the work was real. It seems disinspiriting for a man to hack away at trees in a wood, and at the end of his clearing come to rocks or the sea or whatever disappoints him as leading to nothing; but still, turn the man's face, point him to new trees and the true direction, and who will compare his power arising from experience with that of another who has been confirming himself all the time in the belief that chopping wood is incredible labour, and that the first blow he strikes will be sure to jar his arm to the shoulder without shaking a leaf on the lowest bough? I stand at present and wait like such a fellow as the first of these; if the real work should present itself to be done, I shall begin at once and in earnest . . . not having to learn first of all how to keep the axe-head from flying back into my face; and if I stop in the middle, let the bad business of other years show that I was not idle nor altogether incompetent.

There, my brave Domett, is the Author's flourish you call forth, but it is, at bottom, very sincere fact. You know, in the world they bid one secure a livelihood and then try to be rich: so, fancy me subsisting respectably on what you see, and about to adventure for what you shall see . . . God willing! which includes, "and the body availing"—which I am neither sure of nor despondent about. All cant apart, better suffer physically than morally—wear yourself out in work than in vexation that you did not work . . . as (you will be sure to think) you could have done so notably.

I have some important objects in view with respect to my future life—which I will acquaint you with next time I write, when they will be proved attainable or no.

You see all newspapers, know of all occurrences infinitely better than I. This change of ministry makes for you surely! Your "Declaration of Wrongs" has been properly appreciated, I do hope! Of late I have not seen Dowson (he lives no longer at dear old Limehouse . . . which I love

heartily for the sake of his four walls and front court, all I know of it), and Arnould I do not see as often as I ought and might; yet they know nothing precisely about any good befallen you, or I should hear it, I am certain. Both men are true as truth, and their wives are part of them—we never, *I am sure*, have talked for a quarter of an hour together since your departure without "bringing you in." Shall I say, spitefully, that I do believe if you returned to-morrow we *ought* not to give you an extraordinary welcome—whether we *should*, or no?—for you have never been really out and away from the midst of us.

My father and mother are pretty well—the latter especially; my sister is quite well. They at this moment (I having called out down stairs) send up the most energetic of desires to be spoken of as your best of well-wishers. "Let him but come back and come here," they say—so says your affectionate friend,

R. B.

This letter—so valuable and interesting for the profession of poetical faith which it contains — was, as matters turned out, the last to be written by Browning to Domett for many a year; and had Domett "come back and come here" as invited, he would not have found his friend at New Cross to welcome him. The "important objects in view with respect to my future life," of which Browning writes, proved, as the world knows, to be attainable; but it was not Browning who acquainted Domett with them. The next letter in the series is from Arnould; and it is he who sketches for their common friend the course of Browning's courtship of Miss Barrett.

The story of this romance has been told fully and authoritatively elsewhere, principally in the words of Elizabeth Barrett herself. Arnould's letter adds nothing to our knowledge in this respect, and some of his epithets are so strong that one is tempted to suppress them; but this part of the letter has already been published elsewhere, so that suppression would be useless. Moreover, the facts of

the case being now well known, this expression of opinion upon them can do no harm, and it has its interest as a contemporary opinion by a friend of one of the parties concerned, expressed with the greater warmth which a man naturally feels for his friend's ill-treatment.

J. ARNOULD TO A. DOMETT

Nov. 30, 1846.

My dear old Friend,—The punctual sailing (as I am informed) of the present packet has taken me by surprise, and must account, I fear, for a briefer letter than I should otherwise have sent. I may now, I feel sure, congratulate you on having been for some time a member of the legislative council: all your friends here think and feel that you *ought* to have had the appointment, with which Mr. Eyre is going out, of Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony. Never mind! they must have you at last, so stick hard, and work away at what you have immediately before you, relying upon that

future which I feel certain has so many of those rewards in store for you which the gratitude of nations, or rather their sense of duty, always gives to competent men. That your turn will come no one here doubts. I think the last piece of news I told you of was Browning's marriage to Miss Barrett—which I had then just heard of. She is, you know, or else I told you or ought to have told you, our present greatest living English "poetess." She had been for some years an invalid, leading a very secluded life in a sick room in the household of one of those tyrannical, arbitrary, puritanical rascals who go sleekly about the world, canting Calvinism abroad, and acting despotism at home. Under the iron rigour of this man's domestic rule she, feeble and invalided, had grown up to eight and thirty years of age[1] in the most absolute and enforced seclusion from society: cultivating her mind to a wonderful amount of accomplishment, instructing herself in all languages, reading

[1] That was her age at the time of the first interchange of letters, in January 1845.

Chrysostom in the original Greek, and publishing the best metrical translation that has yet appeared of the "Prometheus Bound"[1] —having also found time to write three volumes of poetry, the last of which raised her name to a place second only to that of Browning and Tennyson, amongst all those who are not repelled by eccentricities of external form from penetrating into the soul and quintessential spirit of poetry that quickens the mould into which the poet has cast it. Well, this lady so gifted, so secluded, so tyrannised over, fell in love with Browning in the spirit, before ever she saw him in the flesh—in plain English loved the writer before she knew the man. Imagine, you who know him, the effect which his graceful bearing, high demeanour, and noble speech must have had on such a mind when she first saw the man of her visions in the twilight of her darkened room. She was at

[1] Rather excessive praise for the earlier version of 1833, and the new translation, though actually composed before this date, cannot have been known to Arnould, as it was not published until 1850. Probably Arnould had not read the version of which he speaks.

once in love as a poet-soul only can be: and Browning, as by contagion or electricity, was no less from the first interview wholly in love with her. This was now some two years back; from that time his visits to her have been constant. He of course wished to ask her of the father openly. "If you do," was her terrified answer, "he would immediately throw me out of window, or lock me up for life in a darkened room." There was one thing only to be done, and that Browning did: married her without the father's knowledge, and immediately left England with her for Italy, where they are now living at Pisa in as supreme a state of happiness as you can fancy two such people in such a place. The old rascal father of course tore his beard, foamed at the mouth, and performed all other feats of impotent rage: luckily his wrath is absolutely idle, for she has a small independence of some £350 per ann., on which they will of course live prosperously. I heard from him a week back, in which he mentions you most kindly, and begged me to tell you all about him—

he is a glorious fellow, by God ! Oh, I forgot to say that the *soi-disante* invalid of seven years, once emancipated from the paternal despotism, has had a wondrous revival, or rather, a complete metamorphosis; walks, rides, eats and drinks like a young and healthy woman—in fact is a healthy woman of, I believe, some five and thirty[1]—a little old—too old for Browning—but then one word covers all: they are in Love, who lends his own youth to everything.

Lovell has brought out a comedy at the Haymarket with the most complete success —"Look before you Leap" the title, which, however, the English papers will tell you all about; only *mind*, it has been much more successful than said papers would give you a notion of. One thing, too, they will not inform you of, which is that we—*the set*—with a sprinkling of ladies —my wife, Mrs. Joseph Dowson, &c.—all dine together at the British Coffee-house in

[1] Actually forty; Arnould had apparently forgotten his own statement of her age at the beginning of his narrative.

Cockspur Street — the old British — with *Lovell*, and adjourn afterwards all together to the play — fine old Blundell being the munificent donor of the feast, where, depend upon it, *you* will not be forgotten. We—that is, Maria and myself —talk of you more than any one else; Maria especially always complains that there is no one with whom she can talk with the full earnestness and interest that she did with you, and never ceases to regret the long happy evenings of the olden time. We *must* renew them, my dear fellow —we WILL renew them—leaving the when and where to the "unsearchable disposer" of destiny: 'tis the hour to which both she and myself look forward as the most delightful anticipation of our future lives—feeling at the same time that there are other things besides seas to be traversed in order to arrive at such a consummation. You and I must both have made several steps in advance before we can meet with that perfect self-congratulation which will be necessary to the true enjoyment of our interview. My steps

in advance are at present of the tardiest kind. I have met with unexpected difficulties in the completion of my book, which is now, however, I hope, just on the point of printing; and as it has occupied a rather engrossing share of my time, I have very little increased my general business. *Au reste*, we live just as ever—quietly, intellectually, to my way of thinking delightfully, just according to the ideal which I had always formed to myself of the estate matrimonial. I have to thank you for all the papers you have been so kind as to send me—even more for your many letters; pray continue to write whenever you have an opportunity, for be assured there is nothing which gives so much delight as one of your letters to your old and true friend, Joseph Arnould, and your less old but not less true friend Maria Arnould, who sends you all the kind regards and best wishes that friend can express to friend.

Charles Lamb's complaint that matrimony dulls the edge of pre-nuptial friendships might

seem to find some justification in the case of Browning. At any rate Domett might be excused for thinking so; for from the date of Browning's marriage the regular succession of letters to New Zealand came to an end. Arnould was one of the trustees of Browning's marriage settlement, and with him some correspondence was maintained; but to Domett went no word except at second hand. Probably, however, this was in part due to the absence of facilities in Italy for sending letters to New Zealand. Even from England they went but rarely; from the dominions of the Grand Duke of Tuscany it is hardly likely that they went at all. No doubt it would have been possible to write by way of England, and Arnould or Dowson would have been a ready go-between; but it is common experience that little obstacles like this do serve to check correspondence, and that a habit of not writing is easily acquired. The disuse does not necessarily imply a cooling of friendship; and that Browning's feelings towards Domett had not suffered essential

change is proved by the affectionate reference to him (the more affectionate because nothing in the poem calls for or suggests such a reference) in the last lines of "A Guardian Angel," written in 1848. But the letters ceased; and Domett's loss is our loss too. For the next years we have nothing but a few extracts from Arnould's letters, copied by Domett into his album for the sake of their references to Browning; and even they are few and far between.

J. ARNOULD to A. DOMETT

July 16, 1847.

Browning is spending a luxurious year in Italy—is, at this present writing, with his poetess bride dwelling in some hermit hut in "Vallombrosa, where the Etruscan shades high overarched embower." He never fails to ask pressingly about you, and I give him all your messages. I would to God he would purge his style of obscurities—that the wide world would, and the gay world and even the less illuminated part of the thinking world,

know his greatness even as we do. I find myself reading "Paracelsus" and the "Dramatic Lyrics" more often than anything else in verse.

THE SAME TO THE SAME

Sept. 19, 1847.

Browning and his wife are still in Florence: both ravished with Italy and Italian life; so much so, that I think for some years they will make it the Paradise of their poetical exile. I hold fast to my faith in "Paracelsus." Browning and Carlyle are my two crowning men amongst the highest English minds of the day. Third comes Alfred Tennyson. . . . By-the-bye, did you ever happen upon Browning's "Pauline"? a strange, wild (in parts singularly magnificent) poet-biography: his own early life as it presented itself to his own soul viewed poetically: in fact, psychologically speaking, his "Sartor Resartus": it was written and published three years before "Paracelsus," when Shelley was his God.

THE SAME TO THE SAME

Feb. 26, 1848.

Browning and his wife are still at Florence, and stay there till the summer: he is bringing out another edition of his poems (except "Sordello"), Chapman and Hall being his publishers, Moxon having declined. He writes always most affectionately, and never forgets kind inquiries about and kind messages to you.

THE SAME TO THE SAME

Dec. 18, 1851.

Browning and his wife are now settled in Paris. I caught a glimpse of them while in town. He is *absolutely* the same man: her I like of all things—full of quiet genius.

THE SAME TO THE SAME

High Court, Bombay,
August 7, 1868.

. . . As to Browning . . . an old friend writes . . . He is in all the grand houses in London, and made a god of. I have not written to or heard from him since his poor wife's death. I was a Trustee of their marriage-settlement.

THE SAME TO THE SAME

[*Date torn off* (*but later*).]

I feel sure that Browning could never have received the letter you spoke of: had he done so he would have answered it. He may be—I believe is—in high, the best, London society, but he has not, and never had, any of the English hard and brusque arrogance about him—on the contrary, was Italian and diplomatic in his courteousness. Till his wife's death we used to correspond —since then it has dropped, but quite as

much through my fault as his. I am sure you will find he will be delighted to see you when you go back.

The letter referred to in the last extract was, no doubt, that which Domett wrote to Browning on hearing of the death of his wife. The reason why it was never answered is given below, in the first letter written by Browning after Domett's return to England renewed their intercourse. Domett, however, could not at the time know the reason, and may naturally have felt that his friend had passed out of his life, and that it might be useless to try to pick up the dropped threads when he returned to London. Arnould, whose correspondence with Browning had been maintained to a much later date, and who had probably seen him on his occasional visits to England, knew better; and his assurances to Domett as to his friend's unchanged sentiments were well grounded. Domett returned to his native land at the end of 1871, and in February 1872 called on Browning in Warwick

Crescent. The following letters explain the sequel; and with them may be linked a couple of sentences from a letter of Browning's to Miss Blagden, written on March 30:[1] "Waring came back the other day, after thirty years' absence, the same as ever — nearly. He has been Prime Minister at New Zealand for a year and a half, but gets tired, and returns home with a poem."

MISS BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

19 WARWICK CRESCENT,
UPPER WESTBOURNE TERRACE,
Feb. 1872.

MY DEAR MR. DOMETT,—My brother was so sorry to miss you yesterday; he is a man of many engagements, and unfortunately is engaged every evening next week, or I would ask you to join our family dinner as soon as possible — but meanwhile, as he is impatient to see you,

[1] See Mrs. Orr's "Life," p. 293.

will you be very kind and come to lunch with us on Monday at one o'clock? We shall be delighted to meet you. If you cannot come on Monday, name some other morning.—Always yours truly,

SARIANNA BROWNING.

Friday mg.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

19 WARWICK CRESCENT,
UPPER WESTBOURNE TERRACE,
March 1, 1872.

DEAR DOMETT,—How very happy I am that I shall see you again! I never could bear to answer the letter you wrote to me years ago, though I carried it always about with me abroad in order to muster up courage some day which never came: it was too hard to begin and end with all that happened during the last thirty years. But come and let us begin all over again. My sister tells you how your coming may be

managed most easily.—Ever affectionately yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

The poem with which Domett returned home was, of course, "Ranolf and Amohia"; and it was natural that he should turn to Browning for help in getting it published. Browning recommended him to his own publisher, who was likewise his trusted friend and counsellor, Mr. George Smith, head of the firm of Smith, Elder & Co. The following letters relate to the negotiations which followed. Mr. Smith, with a natural distrust of long poems, and seeing, no doubt, the patent faults of Domett's poetical style—the diffuseness, the tendency to philosophical disquisition, the not infrequent lapses into commonplace—while even its merits, such as the fine descriptions of colonial scenery, were not of a kind to appeal to the general public, gave at first an unfavourable answer. Whether Domett then tried other publishers, as suggested in Browning's second letter, there is nothing to

show. Probably Browning's influence prevailed over Mr. Smith's perfectly correct business instincts; for certainly it was by the house of Smith, Elder & Co. that "Ranolf and Amohia" was published, during this same year of 1872.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

19 WARWICK CRESCENT,
UPPER WESTBOURNE TERRACE, W.,
MONDAY, *March* 11 [1872].

MY DEAR DOMETT,—I make haste to say that I have seen Smith—that he will gladly see either you or your poem or both, whenever you please, and will do or advise the best for you (he thinks he published something on New Zealand of your writing). I really think him very sympathetic and liberal, and recommend you to see and hear what he may have to say. A visit should be in the afternoon.—Ever affectionately yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

BROWNING AND DOMETT

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

19 Warwick Crescent, W.,
March 22, '72.

My dear Domett,—I am vexed, of course, yet not too much; equally of course, I knew that to print a poem of 14,000 lines is formidable work. I dare say Smith's reluctance implies no more than *that;* indeed, I observe that you go over his faint lines with a thick dab of your own brush, as heretofore. Now, don't do this, if you please. I advise you to try Murray certainly—the issue is uncertain, even more than in Smith's case, probably—because he *is*, what you suppose, a very towering personage, and likely to "go in for" great success or, at least, illustration: still, you that have managed rougher men, will you be brained absolutely by the tap of a publisher's paper-knife? Try him, and then, if it must be so, try yourself, and pay your own expenses. I want that course deferred to the last, because anybody else, who lends a

shoulder, eases you of a bit of the burthen: but print somehow, even at a sacrifice, the work of your life (in a sort)—certainly, with whatever the result, I would run the risk. I hardly stop to assure you that I don't think publishers nor public—no, nor poets proper —infallible or anything of the sort: I should have earned my experience to little purpose indeed if I gave in to such absurdity.

As to my "selection,"[1] some or many or most of what you want to see will be there surely enough. I went through the business, however, with reference to the imaginary life of a sort of man, beginning with one set of likings and fancyings, and ending with another: and, as there is a good deal of matter to choose from, I must *pick*, you know, here a little and there a little. But all is done and getting ready by this time. How are you? I go out of town next week for a few days: but I must not lose sight of you now you are once within range.—Ever yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

[1] The first series of "A Selection from the Poetical Works of Robert Browning," published in 1872.

BROWNING AND DOMETT

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

19 WARWICK CRESCENT,
UPPER WESTBOURNE TERRACE, W.,
June 16, '73.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—I was meaning every day almost, this many a week, to look you up every next day; but I want a favour of you, and, as time presses somewhat, write at once, and keep the other thing in view. A minute ago I have had a visit from a servant, well known to me these eleven years, who left Arabel Barrett, my sister-in-law, to be married. She has a couple of girls, and sails next Friday for New Zealand—Queensland [1]—with her husband, who thinks he shall better his condition there. He is a smith—"a fitter," whatever that may be, and proposes to work on the railways; the woman is desirous of working too, as cook,

[1] It is to be feared that this is a characteristic illustration of English ignorance of the colonies in the seventies. Browning, with a friend in New Zealand, might have been expected to know better. See the next letter.

housekeeper, or what not. I know her to be of absolute honesty, conscientiousness, with every talent requisite for ordinary employment, and really superior education, while the husband has the highest character for sobriety and industry. Now, this Helen, wife of Henry James Chapman aforesaid, came to bid me good-bye, and ask if I could give her any letter to anybody likely to be of use. If you can send me a word for such a person, you *will*, I know; I can answer for it that your recommendation shall not be misplaced, there! Kindest regard to Mrs. Domett and your son, and prayers for indulgence to your well-intending, ill-performing old friend,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING to A. DOMETT

19 Warwick Crescent, W.,
June 19, '73.

My dear Domett,—Thanks for your goodness and promptitude. I took down the

place of destination from Mrs. Chapman's lips, and reported of it to you the minute she left me. She was nervous and I uncritical. She answers my inquiry this morning—"goes to the Province of Canterbury, New Zealand"—sails only on the 25th, so that such a patent letter as you propose would reach her in time and be of all the service she desires, and I would desire. All the rest I have said before—about the absolutely good person that she is, and the meritorious person her husband may in all likelihood be.

When you return, the old sins of omission shall be repaired. I have seen nothing of Arnould, though I have real business to get him to confer about. I will try and see him. I hoped you would like the Poem. Mr. Macadam's review I never saw; he wrote for the book, and promised to send the newspaper. Kind remembrances to Mrs. Domett and your son.—Ever yours affectionately,

R. Browning.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT.

19 WARWICK CRESCENT, W.,
June 28, '73.

Only a word, dear Domett, to say how completely the thing I wanted has been furnished by your kindness. My people sailed on the 25th, leaving word whither I was to address a letter; and I despatch your most efficient one (together with the private letter) by to-day's post. I shall hope to see you very soon, but can only repeat my thanks.—Ever affectionately yours,

ROBERT BROWNING.

The last letter in the correspondence was called forth by the publication in 1877 of Domett's "Flotsam and Jetsam," a collection of new things and old. Among the latter was the poem called forth by a hostile criticism on "Pippa Passes," which has

been mentioned earlier.[1] These are, no doubt, the "lines" referred to here. The volume was headed by the affectionate dedication to Browning which has been printed on p. 19.

R. BROWNING TO A. DOMETT

19 WARWICK CRESCENT, W.,
Apr. 11, '77.

MY DEAR DOMETT,—I have waited a week, and I can't help myself: in another, I shall find it *too* hard even to try to say something, as I now intend to do. I am sure you know that I never expected, in my simple appreciation of your genius from first to last, anything like this munificence of over-payment. Yes, I know how you gave me your warmest countenance when most of the faces around me were none of the friendliest: you *did* read me those lines

[1] See p. 20.

—which, of course, I retain, and do *not* more value now that "Ranolf and Amohia" proves of what value the whole reading England ought to account praise of its Author's. But I really can say nothing to the purpose on this head. As for the Book you preface with this approbation of poor me—I had read and well remember all the earlier portion: the second part is full of beauty and ingenuity. You know George the Gentleman was wont to wonder concerning Mr. Turveydrop—"Why, now, has that man not fifty thousand a year?" I am sure, I wonder with better reason why this man has not as much recognition as he so generously himself gives away. Perhaps this may even yet be set right—but that it may *not*, is undoubtedly "on the cards" also. In any case, you have the heartiest love and estimation of one man—though he be no more than, dear Domett,—Yours truly ever,

ROBERT BROWNING.

I can't re-read—there will be absurdities, of course; but you will make out the meaning.

With this characteristic interchange of warm-hearted affection the correspondence fitly ends.

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THE END

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